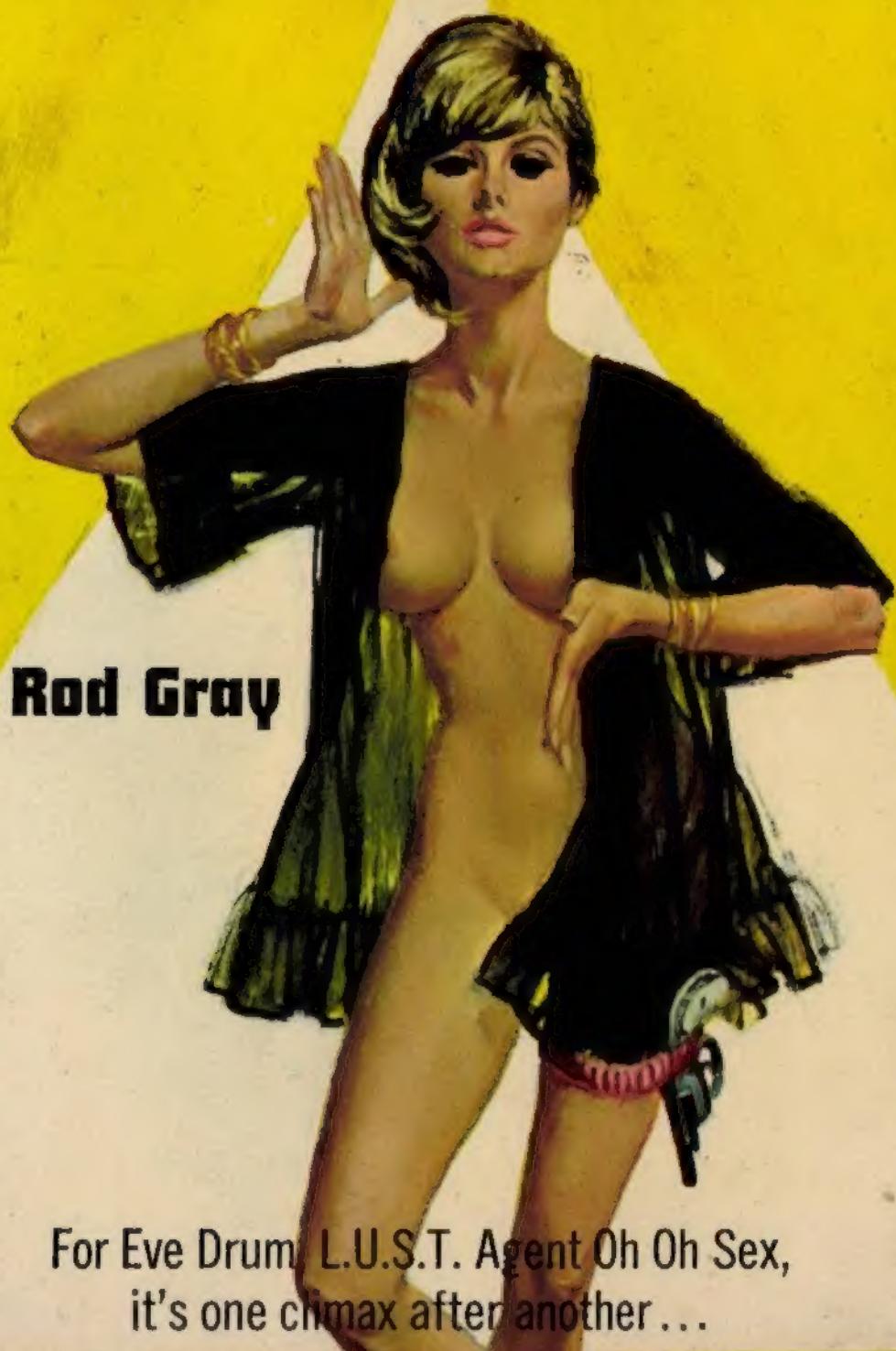


THE LADY FROM L.U.S.T. #10

**THE
BIG SNATCH**

TOWER 45-276 95¢



Rod Gray

For Eve Drum, L.U.S.T. Agent Oh Oh Sex,
it's one climax after another...

Personal History: Eve Drum, L.U.S.T. Agent...

“My name is Eve Drum. When I was much younger I had wanted very desperately to become a lady cracksman. My father is a locksmith and taught me his trade. I went to classes in judo and karate. I am a wearer of the red and white Sixth Dan belt. I have been well trained in sex and sabotage, and I took my training seriously. I am a girl athlete, a femme fatale, and a walking encyclopedia all at the same time.”

Eve Drum didn’t get to be L.U.S.T.’s (League of Undercover Spies and Terrorists) most highly prized operator on looks alone. But she could have. And in Volume #10 you’ll see the super-sexy lady spy in the hottest adventure of her career.

THE
BIG
SNATCH

by Rod Gray

an espionage novel

A TOWER BOOK

THE BIG SNATCH

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PROLOGUE

The Laotian jungle was still, breathless in the humid night over which a pallid moon hung, speckled with the topmost, feathery branches of the tapang trees. Then a bush chat cawed somewhere in the blackness, and a leopard screamed with hunger in its throat.

In a little thatch hut, a girl moaned softly.

A man was bent above her full, smooth breasts, gently laving their sleek surfaces with his tongue. Her heavy young breasts trembled to the caress, she squirmed and moaned again, her hands fluttering about his cheeks, running tenderly through his long-uncut brown hair.

He whispered against her swollen nipple, "They will be here by dawn, the Pathet Lao. They are going to try and kill me. If they find you with me, they will kill you too."

"Yes, Johnee. I know."

"You must run away before dawn."

"I do not want to live without you."

His lips pursed, browsed across her breast. The nipple slipped into his mouth, he kissed it hungrily like a babe at the breast of its mother. The girl shook to the pleasure spasms of her flesh, her palms caught his cheeks, lifting his head so her glowing brown eyes could look deep into his blue eyes.

"I weel die with you, Johnee."

"I don't want you to die, Ogum, I want you to live, to tell the man in the big building in Bangkok what I have done with the cylinder. You must live—if you love me."

Tears filled her eyes, brimmed over onto her cheeks. Mouth wide open, she drew his lips to her and kissed

him, lashing his tongue with her tongue, her teeth grating against his teeth in the frenzy of her emotions. She squirmed her naked body against his nakedness, shivered when his hands went down her soft back to her even softer buttocks.

"Please, Johnee, let me die with you?"

"No, Ogum. For my sake—live."

In the moonlight that filtered into the hut, the man studied the girl so close to him. Her face was oval, framed by a spill of thick black hair that ran down almost to the buttocks he held in his hands, when it was freed of the clips and pins that normally held it atop her head. Her eyes were huge, brown and glowing. The lips he had kissed to a beestung heaviness were even normally full and generously shaped.

She was a Thailander, she came from a village close to Bangkok, called Nunn Kap. She had come seeking service with him on his trip eastward into Laos, she could cook, make camp, she knew the native dialects. Her father had been a trader and had taken her and her sister with him on his journeys to Vietiane and the little villages along the Mekong River in Laos, and so she knew also the territory where he wanted to go.

Ogum Tarang was pretty. Her voluptuous body was slimly curved and with outsized breasts bare under a thin covering of striped cotton that held them tightly so they jounced a little when she moved. She had smiled when she first saw John Meadows looking at her breasts, and her eyes glowed with pride and invitation at their first camping site.

She had never asked what it was that brought this big American into the Laotian highlands, though she must have wondered. His equipment consisted, outside his small tent and cooking gear, of a high-powered hunting rifle, a canteen, two Colt revolvers, a wicked-looking dagger, and some fishing tackle.

"Just a vacation," he said once, when she hinted that the Loatian jungle was no place for an American to go in these times. "I want to do some fishing, some big-game hunting, that's all."

On that first night in camp, their relationship had been established for what it was. As she bent above the little cooking fire her cotton wraparound clung to her full buttocks and Meadows, who had been a long time without a woman, felt his mouth go dry and his healthy body respond to those plump moons. He stepped up behind her, pressed his loins into her behind and reached around her body for her dangling breasts.

She laughed softly, bumped her rump back into his maleness and cooed when his hands scooped her heavy breasts out of their covering. He caressed her soft flesh, tugging on her erected nipples until she began to sob softly in passion.

Since that night, she had been his mistress.

In the five weeks of their trip, John Meadows and Ogum Tarang had fallen in love. When he learned where it was in Saravane that the plans for the Pathet Lao takeover of Laos were contained, it was Ogum who bought a magnet in a store and watched as he tied it on a fishing line.

She watched too as Meadows cast his line through an open window of a house and dropped the magnet neatly on the metal box that contained those plans. Meadows returned the empty box, but the plans themselves he rolled up tightly in a tin cylinder—it was a small tin can, actually, that by soldering he had sealed—and hid it among his effects.

Somewhere along the line, something had gone wrong. Perhaps someone had seen him making his casts or abandon the box. Or perhaps it was just the suspicious minds of the Pathet Lao guerrillas infiltrating Laos at the moment. For, two days out of Saravane,

Meadows had seen signs that a small party of the Pathet Lao were following their trail.

He had cut northward in an attempt to shake them, using all his jungle knowledge, and that of Ogum Tarang. They had fled with laughter in their voices, considering it a game, at first. John Meadows had what he had come for, in the little tin cylinder, and a sense of satisfaction with a job well done gave him added confidence.

They had come out of the jungle onto the Bolovens plateau, running across the open spaces where they were visible, Meadows swinging his machete to clear a path through the tropical jungle for them when the forests closed in. Sometimes he put the machete into its scabbard and bulled his way between the tree ferns and hanging lianas. Sweat oozed constantly from their pores, for the humidity in this pre-monsoon season was frightful.

Yesterday morning they had stood and looked across the jungle treetops at a tiny glitter of gold in the near distance. Meadows had seen it first and had pointed it out in an excited voice.

"Look Ogum! Man built that thing, whatever it is. There may be sanctuary there."

"No, Johnee. That is the Temple of the Thousand Deaths. No man can enter that place without being killed. Why or how I don't know. But they are."

He grinned weakly. "Maybe we can lead the Pathet Lao inside it."

Her head shook sadly. "They are not stupid, they know the temple and the death it deals out to any who enter it. They will avoid it as they would a cobra snake."

They had plunged on into the rain forest, panting, near exhaustion, until they came to an abandoned thatch hut where they decided to sleep the night. Ogum

prepared the evening meal before it grew dark, so that the following Pathet Lao guerrillas should not see the flames of their campfire. Meadows loaded his rifle and his two revolvers.

"I make a stand here," he said softly.

His eyes touched the girl where she moved about the fire, turning the three birds she had trapped earlier, plucked, and placed inside board leaves for cooking. Her body had grown even slimmer, he thought, without proper diet. Yet her breasts were just as large, and her hips as rounded.

Against the heat, she had discarded her striped cotton wraparound and wore only a cotton shift about her hips. Her dusky breasts swung to the movements of her arms, and where the shift hiked up, he could see the lower halves of her buttocks.

Ogum Tarang had shapely legs, the legs of a white woman, instead of the thin sticks the native women boasted. Meadows never tired of looking at her legs, just as he delighted in feasting his stare on her swaying hips or on the bouncing fullnesses of those breasts.

He was aware that in these humid rain forests, he had become a sensualist. All he could see was this young woman, all he lived for were the nights when they both went mad with that almost divine rut-heat the French named *avoir velleites*. On broad fern beds, on the bare ground, rammed back into a treebole, they made their love, and never tired of it.

It was as if they both knew death was at their heels, and would find them at some unsuspecting hour of the day or night. They felt they had a short time to live, and they must enjoy life and its sensual pleasures now, while they could.

And so John Meadows tongued the hard breasts the sexually excited girl fed him, and kissed lower onto the broader plain of her heavy, sweat-soaked belly, there to

pasture with his kisses until Ogum Tarang gave shrill little cries that were half-enjoyment, half-invitation.

He did not plead with her any more to run away and save herself, a part of him wanted her to die when he died, so they might be together after death, if what the priests and ministers taught was true—that there was a life beyond death. The sensualism in his was at its full flowering.

From her mounded belly, his lips went lower.

Ogum Tarang opened her eyes, her lips parted to show her teeth. Back and forth went her head, feeling his kisses go closer and closer to the puff of brownish hair at her mons Veneris. She squirmed, letting her thighs fall open.

"*Oui*," she breathed. "*Oui, mon ange. Baissez-moi!*"

He kissed her, nestling close, using his lips and tongue on her flesh until she had to cram a little fist into her mouth to keep from screaming with delight. John Meadows had taught her this bit of loveplay, had made her eager for it. If she must die soon, then let her die with the memory of this pleasure still surging through her flesh.

As though he shared her feelings, he let out all the stops this night. His hands squeezed her buttocks, lifting them, his lips and tongue fed on her *minon* until her thighs tightened about his head and her body went into convulsions.

Then he kissed his way back up her body, stroking her naked sides with his fingertips until she reached for him, guiding him. Their bodies joined almost savagely, and they bounced and thumped a pathway through the Elysium Fields of erotica until the sweet death overtook and claimed them.

They lay in their embrace for minutes, his lips kissing her soft throat, until she wriggled and laughed thickly, deep in her throat at his renewed strength. There was a

madness in their flesh, caused by the threat of the unseen Pathet Lao guerrillas somewhere behind them in the rain forests.

For hours they enjoyed one another, their inventiveness of embrace equalled only by the desire surging through their flesh. Her hands caressed his body, kissed and tongued. His teeth nipped her buttocks, her nipples, her inner thighs.

Toward dawn, they slept.

Hours later, they rolled apart. The sun was well up in the sky, and the guerrillas would have been long upon their trail. Ogum Tarang kissed his lips, then surged to her feet.

Naked, she walked outside the hut.

John Meadows smiled and rolled over onto his back, his eyes following that dusky body moving toward the dead branches in the cooking fire.

The jungle erupted around them with rifle fire.

Eyes wide, Meadows saw that beloved body jerk, convulse. It staggered three steps, still bucking, as tiny black holes appeared in her torso, black holes that ran red while she still stood, swaying.

Meadows screamed with hate, with despair.

His hand went for the revolver in its holster. His other hand grabbed at the tin cylinder that held those precious plans. It was death to go outside the tent—yet he crawled out through an opening in the hut wall on his belly, digging toes and elbows into the ground.

At all cost, he must hide that tin cylinder!

Perhaps another agent of L.U.S.T., the organization that paid him so well, would find it, and take it back to L.U.S.T. headquarters, to be turned over to the United States Government.

He was realist enough to know he was going to die here in the Laotian highlands, but death would only mean that the Pathet Lao could not torture him into re-

vealing the location of the cylinder. Ogum Tarang was dead, and he wanted to be with her, anyhow. But first, he must hide the tin can.

He crawled, using the vegetation of the jungle floor as a disguise, hearing the *tok tok* of the barbet bird as it seemed to beat out time for him like the ticking of a clock. He crawled more swiftly, for the guerrillas made no sound, no shrill outcry of discovery.

In front of him, through the openings between the treeboles, he caught glimpses of the Temple of the Thousand Deaths. Meadows grinned wryly. The temple would make the perfect hiding place, if what Ogum had said were true, that it dealt death to any who stepped inside its walls.

Let the Pathet Lao see him hurl the cylinder.

If they went into the temple after it, they would die. In a way, he would get his revenge on them for having killed the woman he loved. He was tempted to get to his hands and knees, to make a run for it; but the guerrillas were used to these jungles, they would surely spot him.

He dreaded being killed before hurling the tin can into the temple. He would play it safe, he would go on slithering along the ground and hope. For a moment he lay still on his belly, listening for any sound that might betray the presence of the enemy.

tok tok tok

The barbet bird again, telling him that time was moving, moving, always moving, as he should be, not resting, thinking about Ogum Tarang.

He crawled on.

The Temple of the Thousand Deaths was not large, as temples of Southeast Asia go. It was no more than half the size of the Banteai Srei temple at Angkor Wat. Its tiered spire rose upward, pushing through a growth of banyan trees, the roots of which had penetrated into its chambers and sanctuaries. The temple was walled, there

had been a garden around it centuries ago, but now the garden was no more than a mass of wild vegetation and crumbled statuary.

The green patina of age lay over its stones, half-hidden behind the moss and creeping vines that had overgrown its gardens. The walls were sculpted with figures of men and women—the Khmers who had built Angkor Wat?—and to one side of the entryway, a frieze of warriors armed with sharp swords was seen, perhaps stone representations of the demons who guarded the temple from desecration.

Meadows crawled over the first of the flat flaggings, humped and broken where tree roots had begun to take over the monument to mankind's gods. Looming before him was an avenue of seated figures perched upon coiled *nagas*, representations of the snake deity whom the early Khmers worshipped.

He could see the open doorway and the flaggings of the inner temple. There was an altar in there, and crushed stones forming a kind of pavement.

He got to his feet and ran, the tin cylinder in a hand. Five feet, ten feet, he raced, before a voice cried out behind him.

“There! He carried the cylinder!”

“Kill him before he enters the temple.”

Meadows rose to his feet and darted forward, lifting his right hand. Ahead of him was the doorway; he must hurl the cylinder deep into the shadows of the temple, to give its curse time to work against any of the Pathet Lao guerrillas who dared to enter. He did not want a single one of them to get his hands on the little tin can.

He saw the flash of sunlight on the tin as he threw it. Then it was gone inside the temple, flying high and far. It hit the statue of a goddess, and bounced sideways. It rolled along the stone flaggings.

Then there was silence.

Meadows whirled, revolver lifting.

Three guerrillas in black pants and jackets, fatigue caps on their heads, stood at the end of the stone path—say with assault rifles lifted. Flame ran from the barrels at him.

John Meadows died on his feet, emptying his revolver at his killers. A dozen bullets struck him almost as one so that he was firing in reflex action even as he pitched forward, spinning crazily as he fell.

At the last moment, he thought he saw Ogum Tarang in among the treeboles, laughing and waving at him.

Phum Kit, who commanded this little Pathet Lao force, stood over his dead enemy and stared into the temple. Phum Kit was a brave man, but he was not stupid. He had lived most of his life here on the Bolovens plateau, and he knew the legend of the Temple of the Thousand Deaths.

The white man had hurled the cylinder in there, and there it would stay, as far as Phum Kit was concerned. He had no reason to die ingloriously, killed by a curse that was more than ten centuries old.

Beside him a Red Chinese, accompanying the guerrilla detail to make sure the master plans were brought back to his superiors, grasped Phum Kit's arm and shook it. He was an impatient man, was Sung Yen. He was not tolerant of incompetence. Besides, he did not know the legend of the temple.

"Well? What are you waiting for? Go in and get the tin can," he snapped. "I must bring it back to my general."

"Not me," said Phum Kit, and spat. "Anyone who enters that temple—dies. Neither I nor any of my men will do it. Let the tin can rot."

Sung Yen stared at the Laotian in amazed disbelief.

"Do not jest with me. I am a good Maoist. I do not like stupid jokes."

"I'm not joking," muttered Phum Kit.

The Red Chinese began to laugh in a shrill voice. "Foolish man! It's a good thing I came along on this trip. Otherwise you and your chicken-hearted soldiers would have left those plans inside for anyone to take. If you are afraid, I'll get the can, myself. Curses! Bah!"

Phum Kit watched Sung Yen walk forward and through the open gateway of the temple. He was very interested to see if the temple curse were still effective. Not since the time of his grandfather's grandfather had anyone been stupid enough to set foot on that cursed ground.

He had warned the Red Chinese. He could not stop him except by taking bodily hold of him. If he had liked Sung Yen, he might have argued a little more, but the man was arrogant, boorish, insulting. He considered the Laotians his inferiors.

Phum Kit leaned on his rifle, waiting.

Sung Yen was inside the temple now, passing the seated figure of a warrior resting on a *naga*. The altar could be seen in shadows, rising tall and mysterious amid the twisted vines that had crept inside the temple. The Red Chinese was walking toward the altar.

Suddenly the man leaped into the air. He put his hand on his chest and stared around him.

Phum Kit felt the hairs on the nape of his neck rise. He had been watching intently, but nothing had touched Sung Yen—or if it had, it was an invisible something which human eyes could not see. He watched the man stagger three more feet, then pitch forward on his face.

The Laotian shook his head. Stupid Maoist pig! He had looked down his nose at his allies—now he was stretched out dead on the temple floor. If the Red Chinese wanted those plans so badly, let Mao Tse-tung

himself come for them. Phum Kit grinned, picturing the fat old Chinese tiptoeing over the temple flaggings.

Phum Kit shrugged. Maybe the world would be better off without Mao Tse-tung. He had the feeling Laos would.

His hand waved, signaling his guerrillas.

In single file, they trotted off into the jungle.

CHAPTER ONE

A bullet chipped the peeling paint off the brickwork to one side of my head as I ran and slid along a narrow alleyway off the Promenade des Anglais in Nice. I ran on, my bare feet never feeling the rough cobblestones. Better a couple of bruises on my soles than a bullet hole in my skin.

I slithered on a patch of mud—it had been raining for a change along the Cote d'Azur—and I hopped and jumped between the puddles to my rented Dauphine Gordini. I dove into the car and slammed the door behind me while I was switching on the ignition.

Fifteen seconds later—the Gordini will accelerate to sixty miles an hour in that time—I was rolling down the Rue de la Republique. My would-be killers were half a mile behind me and fading fast.

I took time out to breathe.

My name is Eve Drum, I am a secret agent for L.U.S.T.—the League of Underground Spies and Terrorists—and I was on vacation. In a manner of speaking, of course. I was at Nice on the Riviera, and I was *supposed* to be enjoying a few weeks of well-earned rest. It was carnival time, that period before Lent when, as with Mardi Gras at New Orleans, the good people of southern France let down their hair and their morals, and have themselves a ball.

Being a secret agent, however, was something else again.

I had been sun-tanning on the beach in a Saint-Tropez bikini, in which the wires of the bra part come below the breasts so the nipples can be seen. The bot-

tom part permits a view of the buttocks too, if you are lying flat on your tummy.

I was lying on my front, getting my back done to a chocolate brown, when I heard the voices. They were speaking Russian. Most visitors to the Riviera do not include Russian among their linguistic achievements; I do, as a L.U.S.T. lady.

“—threw it into the temple! A true capitalistic trick! Now we have to go and get it.”

“And this is your job?”

“*Da!* Word came today. I was just beginning to have a good time here, too. But that is not the worst part. There is some sort of curse on the temple.”

“What kind of curse?”

“Anybody who goes into it gets killed.”

“You can figure out a way, Comrade Stamskovich.”

I lifted my head. Two women were strolling past, deep in conversation. One of them looked vaguely familiar as I lowered my face and hid it with my arm. Where had I seen him before? He was young, not much older than I. His face was even more youthful.

I gasped as memory flooded back.

Babyface! The Cherub whose naked body I had whipped, much to his enjoyment, when he had been working as a waiter during the orgy which Serge Akinov and I had attended in Moscow. It had been my mission in Russia at that time to get Serge Akinov to defect, so he would give us the location of a lost Nazi treasure off the coast of Tunis.

Actually, Serge had been playing a double game—but enough of past history. Right now, I wanted to follow the Cherub and his friend to learn more about this cursed temple and what was in it that was so important the Russian KGB would send the Cherub after it. I got up and ran after them, pretending to be having trouble with my beach blanket so I could use it to hide my face.

The Cherub—or Comrade Stamskovich—looked like a youth from the back. Despite his crudely tailored Russian clothes, he seemed very graceful and walked along the gravelly beach like an athlete. His partner was more stocky, an older man, with a slightly bald head. Neither man was wearing a hat as a concession to the hot Riviera sun.

I came as close as I dared.

“—invasion plans for Thailand. We don’t want them falling into capitalistic hands! It’s bad enough they’re there for the taking. So I’ve got to go and get them back.”

“If the Red Chinese are behind this, why do we have to get their chestnuts out of the fire? I should think they’d send one of their own.”

“The Laotians are very touchy, especially the Pathet Lao. They don’t want to admit they’re traitors. It will sound better if a Russian helps them free their people from the clutches of their ruler. While it is true that Red China will—”

The voice broke off just as I stepped on my blanket and went sprawling. My breasts came leaping up over the wired brassiere, bobbing gracefully as I took a header in the sand. The Cherub had spun around to see if anyone were near enough to overhear his words. His eyes got very big, his mouth fell open.

There I lay, flat on my back, five feet away.

My face was just as exposed as my size 38s. Babyface looked at my breasts first. Who can blame him? And then he looked at my face.

“Bozhe moi! It’s her!”

Recognition was easy to read in his youthful face. And under the recognition was a sudden hardness that made me know that he would not have hesitated to whip out a gun and start shooting, if the beach had been only slightly less crowded.

I scrambled to my feet, turned tail—and ran.

At any moment I expected to feel a lead pellet ramming into my back. My feet raced back and forth on the gravelly beach, then on hot pavement, then on cobblestones. I could hear feet pounding after me as the Russian agents galloped along in my wake.

I had parked my car not far away and I headed for it, saying my prayers mentally—I needed all my breath for running, so I didn't dare use my voice—at every step. I must have prayed enough because outside of that one shot they sent at me, which chipped the paint off the bricks, they didn't shoot any more. . . .

As I barreled along in my Dauphine Gordini, I thought about my vacation, now going up in gunsmoke. I could have wept with sheer feminine anger. The Cherub had spoiled it all. Now I didn't dare go out to have myself a fling. I would be looking for the baby-faced KGB man or his pal every time I turned a corner. And how can anybody have fun with something like that on her back?

I was staying at the Splendid, the first new hotel built in Nice since 1913. It is modern, with baths and balconies. I hungered to get inside my room, drop on the bed and get my nerves back.

My foot braked the Dauphine along the Promenade des Anglais curbstone. I wagged fingers at a parking lot attendant and beat it for the hotel lobby, wrapping my beach blanket around me. I did not stop to ask if they allowed people in Riviera bikinis into the lobby, I just made tracks for the elevator.

The elevator girl smiled at me. I smiled back, weakly.

“Wolves?” she asked, eyebrows arching.

“Yeah, honey—wolves!”

I could have added they were wolves with guns, but I hesitated to tell her any more. Maybe she was taking KGB money to blab her brains out.

"Some of them play rough," she admitted.

I ran for 307. I fitted my key in the lock.

The door opened before I could turn the key. My jaw dropped instinctively; I started to whirl and run some more. Damn those Opposition agents! I thought. They must be able to teleport themselves around.

"Eve, honey—*bonjour!*"

I stopped dead in my tracks. I turned my head. It was big David Anderjanian, my case officer, looming there in the doorway, looking as much like home as apple pie and cheese.

"David!" I bawled, and fell into his arms.

One thing I will say about David Anderjanian. He can be tough, he can be sarcastic, he can toss my girl-girl bod around any way he likes—but he does have a certain understanding when a female needs consolation.

His big arms went around me, he swung me off my feet and in through the doorway. My case officer is six feet of rockhard muscle and bone. He looks like a Viking in modern-day garb, he is blonde and has a sun-tan that makes me envy his whole two hundred and ten pounds.

"Eve, sweetie—what is it? You're shaking like an aspen in a Colorado gale! What happened?"

I saw the other man, then, standing near my bed, with a drink of my scotch in his hand. I goggled at him, because he was everything David Anderjanian was not. He was short, maybe five feet four, fat and small, with dark skin and black hair parted in the middle. His huge white teeth were on view as he beamed at me through gold-framed glasses.

"Oh—er—hello," I muttered.

"Eve, let me present Lap Hai, a high government official from Thailand."

"Oh, no," I sighed, sinking down on the edge of the mattress. I lifted both my hands, palms out. "Stop!"

Don't tell me any more. I can feel it in my feminine bones. My vacation is over. I'm going to Thailand to try and recover some important documents reposing in a cursed temple."

Lap Hai laughed. David merely scowled.

Lap Hai said, "Partly right, partly wrong, Miss Drum."

David growled, "What documents? What temple?"

I told them about the two Russian secret agents who had chased me off the Baie des Ange beach, and about the shot that one of them had snapped at me.

"Somebody threw something into a temple with a curse on it—"

"The Temple of the Thousand Deaths," breathed Lap Hai, "in Laos!"

"So that's what happened to Johnny Meadows," snarled David.

I looked from one to the other, vaguely conscious that my beach blanket had slipped and that I was sitting there damn near naked. I guess I was too interested in their faces to bother about my modesty, however.

David was a study in alarm, Lap Hai in quick terror.

"This will change our plans," Lap Hai was saying.

"No, no, no—I don't think so. Just give me a few minutes to sort all this out," David muttered, beginning to walk up and down the hotel room.

"You see, Eve," he said to me. "Lap Hai came to the General in L.U.S.T. headquarters and asked for help to prevent the killing of his Prince. There's some sort of plot afoot to assassinate him—probably at the same time that the Pathet Lao will rise up in strength—"

"—and Red China will invade her borders!" I exclaimed, in a burst of sudden understanding.

David nodded. "Something like that, yes. John Meadows was a good man. He stumbled on something big. He was on his way to the Laos border with his in-

formation when he disappeared. We haven't been able to find out what happened to him.

"From what you say you overheard, he learned about the Red Chinese invasion plans. We've suspected that, but we had no proof. If we could lay our hands on those plans—we could take them to the United Nations, and hold Red China up for what it is, a power-grabbing nation in the hands of a madman. The invasion would be called off by united world opinion before it got started."

Lap Hai smiled, "At the same time, you could save our Prince from the assassin's bullet, Miss Drum. I am positive the invasion waits on that event before it will begin."

"Ohhh, no," I wailed. "I'm on vacation."

"All leaves have been cancelled in this emergency," David grinned. He has such a nice smile, you wouldn't think he'd use it when he's breaking a girl's heart.

"There goes three weeks in the Riviera sunshine," I went on wailing. "I only got here day before yesterday."

"I came as soon as I could," David nodded. "Lap Hai walked with me out of the General's office and into a limousine that took us directly to the airport."

"Very fast work," the Thailander smiled, nodding.

I knew in my heart that my vacation was ruined, anyhow. The Cherub had seen to that, shooting at me. He and his pal would be scouring Nice for the hotel where I was staying. When they found me, they would find a way to kill me as an enemy agent.

"When can I leave?" I asked.

It was such an about-face that David Anderjanian got his what-are-you-trying-to-pull look. I blew him a kiss. This made him all the more suspicious.

Then I dropped the bombshell. "A month off, David, darling—when the job is done. Those are my terms."

"Fair enough, Eve," he nodded.

The General must have been pretty emphatic about

how much he wanted me on this job, I reflected. Otherwise, David would have hemmed and hawed about loyalty to Uncle Sam and L.U.S.T. and waved some other assorted flags, before giving in.

I got to my feet and stretched. My breasts popped out of the bra top and quivered sensuously. Lap Hai and David gawked at them, their mouths open. I felt so good—after all, I'd wrangled another vacation from my case officer, with another week tossed in as a bonus—I let them look a few seconds before I folded my arms over my bobbing beauties.

"What's my cover?" I asked David.

"You'll be a pleasure girl—and *hastini*," he grinned.

So what else is new? Every time I get a call from L.U.S.T.—where I am known affectionately as Oh Oh Sex—it seems I am always playing the part of an *hastini*, of one sort or another. So long as I get my job done, who cares? I would rather be a live *hastini* than a dead virgin.

Lap Hai offered, "Pleasure girl in Thailand much like geisha in Japan. Very much honored, very much sought after, very rich if she very good at it."

His black eyes gleamed at my size 38s, telling me I would be very good at it, he would bet, but that he would like to try me out just to be sure. Lap Hai might be a little man, but he had a fire burning inside him.

"Sorry, boys—no free samples. Besides, I have to pack. Now, shoo!" I made gestures with my hands. Sighing, Lap Hai went out the door into the hall. David lingered, patting my behind where the bikini bottom failed to cover me, making my soft flesh jiggle.

"Well have to make plans, Eve darling," he whispered.

"Get me a flight out of here on some jet going east," I hissed. "And tell me what I'm supposed to do once I get to Bangkok. I am going to Bangkok?"

"Right. That's where General Thak Parphon has his hideaway. Lap Hai suspects that Thak Parphon is the brains behind the threat to his Prince. Thak will flip over you, Eve. You'll be able to twist him around your little finger."

"Yeah, hey. I'll bet he's just dying to tell me all about his plans."

"You're smart, you can figure out a way to make him talk. Like you'd better, honey—the whole damn world may be depending on it."

"Beat it, buster. Come back when I'm dressed."

I shut the door in his disappointed face. I locked it. I was in no mood for erotic exercises.

In two hours I was packed, ready to take off for Thailand as soon as David made the necessary arrangements. If I knew my case officer, my flight would be scheduled for tomorrow about noon. This would give him the whole night to make love to me and the whole morning to rest up. The way he figures things, I could rest up on the plane.

Room service brought me *potage puree de pois cassés*, *hot boeuf a la mode*, a Romaine salad—and to top it all off, a *creme caramel*. I drank a fine claret wine with it. The thought touched my mind as I wolfed down the feast that I was eating the last meal of the condemned.

David dropped by just as I was pouring coffee from the pot into a cup and lighting up a Virginia Slim. He had made all the arrangements, the darling. I was to fly BOAC to New York, San Francisco, Honolulu, Tokyo, to Hong Kong and then on to Bangkok.

All in all, it was about a three-day trip.

I said, "I'll be bored sick."

David brightened. "How about making your last few hours a—"

"Forget it, David," I mumbled.

I am honestly fond of David Anderjanian, having at times even entertained the rather bizarre notion of marrying him. I got to my feet, put my arms around his neck and gave him a nice, big, juicy kiss. For at least a couple of minutes.

"There," I dimpled. "That's to remember me by."

"Hey, we aren't going to stop there?" he protested.

"Sorry, honeybun—we are. Mama needs her sleep."

"Mama is a tease."

On that note, I blew him a kiss and shoved him out the door. I felt a bit guilty; it had been quite a kiss. Promissory, if you know what I mean. But really, I was bushed.

I slept like an angel. Maybe a naughty angel, but still, an angel.

One thing about David, he holds no grudges. Next morning he was at my door with two bellhops, giving me a big smile and a kiss on the cheek so as not to spoil my make up. He had everything under control, he said with a big grin.

I scowled, thinking about French girls and the Riviera and how my big Viking case officer would not have to look very hard to find the relaxation he needed after last night's great, big, juicy kiss.

I wanted to kick his shins, but I smiled and took his arm. I was still feeling a bit guilty, I guess.

Side by side, David and I walked through the lobby. Nobody was going to take any more pot shots at me with him striding along like a colossus beside little old me. Into the limousine, off to the airport.

They gave me seat 5 in the big VC-10.

Then it was off to Bangkok—and every girl for herself.

Three boring days and nights later, the VC-10 lowered out of the clouds toward the ancient city that straddles the Chao Phraya river, to drop down onto one

of the landing strips of Don Muang Airport. From the air, I had a glimpse of a big metropolis. Bangkok had grown in the past few years, a lot of its *klongs* or canals have been filled in to make roads that team with more than a million and a half people. There were tour barges and vegetable boats on its river and its remaining canals, great Buddhist temples rearing their spires to the sky, and modern hotels and office buildings. Kipling said that East and West shall never meet, but they do a pretty good job of it in Bangkok.

As far as I was concerned, East met West when a slim young man in a chauffeur uniform bowed to me and asked if I was there as the personal guest of Lap Hai, the great diplomat. I admitted I was, and that I was visiting Bangkok at his express invitation.

The young man nodded, asking me to follow him.

"My bags," I said protestingly, "my luggage."

"They will be taken care of," he assured me.

I was invited to step inside a black Mercedes. I was whisked away from Don Muang Airport and along Pet-chaburi Road, then out of the city proper past a couple of roadside shrines until we came to a small park. He turned into the park with its carefully tended banyan and palm trees, and drove along a gravelled road for about half a mile.

Ahead, partially hidden by some shrubbery, was what appeared to be a Buddhist temple. I could see a couple of those spires they call *chedis*, and a number of large, grotesque statues, painted and gilded, that act as guardian spirits, in the courtyard before it. The Mercedes whisked me to a stone stairway between two marble railings.

The chauffeur got out and opened the door.

I put a nyloned leg through the doorway and stepped into the eighteenth century. I guess I just stood there staring, because the chauffeur chuckled.

“Temple of the Curious Caresses,” he chuckled. “Built for King Rama the First, the man who chose site of Bangkok and made it his capital. He called it Krung Theg, the city of the gods.”

“It’s magnificent,” I breathed.

The chauffeur chuckled. “King Rama was a good Buddhist, but he believed in the satisfaction of the senses. He made this his private chapel. Only good friends—mostly women—were allowed to come here and worship Buddha with him. Rama was the Buddha, they say, in this temple.”

“Yeah,” I nodded.

I didn’t need a blueprint.

I was being delivered to a whorehouse.

CHAPTER TWO

I walked up the stone steps and across the flaggings. A bird-woman statue was to my left, a beautifully sculpted piece of artwork, painted to resemble a female from the hips up, and with the slender legs of a bird, below. To my right, and closer to the engraved doorway, stood a larger-than-lifesize statue of a Thai swordsman in the lacquered armor and spired helmet of the old days.

I stepped into the doorway.

The door swung open. A woman stood there, stark naked. She was a dusky little doll with pert breasts tip-tilted with large purple nipples. Her pale brown body was completely shaven, except for the flowing ebon hair that dangled down her back.

She spoke sobe ibberish, eyes opening wide.

“Lap Hai,” I said.

Her pretty face broke into a beaming smile. She

began nodding her head, saying, "Lap Hai—so. Lap Hai—so. Come, come, come."

She opened the door wider. I stepped inside a large chamber in the center of which was what appeared to be an altar to venery. On it sat a female Buddha, with rounded breasts, infolded legs, and an inviting smile in her curving lips and glistening noyx eyes. Her belly was creased, there was a ruby in her navel, and the position of her feet let an onlooker see that her mons Veneris had been completely depilated of all hair.

I gulped and turned. Along each columned wall, other female Buddhas were placed, caught in the middle of a coital convulsion. Each female was part of a man and woman combination that paraphrased the hundred raptures of the Indian erotic god, Shiva. I gave up counting after about twenty, however, because the little doll was tugging my hand, entreating me to follow her.

"What's the name of this place?" I wondered out loud.

Dusky doll was no linguist. Her eyes pleaded ignorance of my words. I waved my hand at the chamber, and arched my eyebrows.

"Name? Name?"

A trill of laughter from the shadows was my answer. A white woman, wearing only a pink negligee and slippers, came striding forward. Her hips were curving, and her shapely legs could have modeled for Schiaparelli stockings. I noted that her heavy breasts sagged a little.

"Pata doesn't understand the lingo, ducks," smiled the woman, holding out her manicured hand. "I'm Dolo—short for Dolores—Hawkins."

"English?"

"Leeds. But I feel I'm part American, too. On my days off I hang around the Whiskey A-Go-Go on Pet-

chaburi Road, where your fly-boys come from Udorn, Takli and the other air bases Uncle Sam maintains here. I pick up Americanese to bolster the King's English."

"Well, I'm sure glad to know you," I told her. "You can teach me the ropes. Lap Hai sent me to keep me out of the hands of a very nasty Russian who wanted me to defect into his bedroom."

Dolo giggled. "You'll be safe—until General Parphon sees you. Then—I don't know."

"Oh? Who's he?"

"Just about the biggest thing in Thailand. There's talk he wants even more power than he has, that he might even want to make himself dictator, but nobody knows anything certain. It's all gossip and rumor. But he's a man like Sukarno of Malaysia. He loves his fleshpots and dips and dabbles in them quite often; I suppose to ease the strain of his political ambitions."

"Comes here a lot, does he?"

"Oh, ducks! Every other night, just about. We put on a show for him—something no censor in the western world would ever let get by, even in the Now theatre. You know?"

I knew. No wonder David Anderjanian and the General had chosen Oh Oh Sex for this assignment. I had no worries about pleasing General Thak Parphon or of catching the old goat's eye, but the matter of the assassination worried me. How in hell was I going to get Thak Parphon to talk?

We were walking out of the central chamber of the temple and along a narrow corridor between two wings of the building. There was a banquet hall and an entertainment stage to the right; to the left were the girls' rooms, lavatories and lounges. Dolo explained that more than a dozen girls lived here all the time, that they gave the exhibitions but that they were so well known

that General Parphon liked to see different pleasure girls from time to time.

"We're always on the hunt for new faces, new bodies," she sighed. "My God, that man has the sexual appetite of a newly matured satyr. Lord! He goes through pussycats the way an alcoholic does whiskey."

Dolo opened a door. A girl squeaked, naked before a mirror, tipping her nipples with a bright-red paste. She was a Thai girl, with a pretty face and a startlingly voluptuous body. Thai women are small, mostly slim, with small breasts. This pussycat had large breasts and plump buttocks, good legs, a slim waist.

"Cut the comedy, Lumm," said Dolo. "You haven't been surprised in twenty years."

Lumm smiled at me, surreptitiously pinching her enlarged red nipples. Her bright-black eyes raked me from my shoe soles to the top of my blonde head. Then the dark orbs settled invitingly on my eyes.

Dolo muttered, "Maybe I better not put you in here; Lumm would wear you out so you'd be no good at all for the show tomorrow night."

Lumm pouted her big red mouth at me.

"I would take very good care of her," she protested. With a faint smile, she added, "I would do my best to get her ready for the show."

"I'll bet," commented Dolo Hawkins wryly. "No thanks. We'll put you in with Pheng Putar. She's regular."

"Tchaaa," snapped Lumm venomously.

Dolo closed the door, smiled wearily. "They're a care, the pets. All kinds of traumas and libidos in here. Pheng Putar is regular, at least. I've heard gossip she's taken up with some English adventurer. She won't be interested in adding you to her scalps."

I said, "I think you should know one thing about me. I can take care of myself. In a bed or in a hair pull."

Dolo brightened. "You can? Well, that's good news. Makes me feel easier about things. We get girls in here, they get beaten up, sometimes. I've always suspected Lumm, but she's so blatant about everything, it seems a little ridiculous."

She opened another door. The room was empty. Dolo nodded. "Make yourself to home, pet. Pheng's out with her Englishman. The bed without the doll is yours."

I tossed my handbag on the neat coverlet as a sign of ownership. The room itself was brightly decorated in yellow and pale green. A corner room, it had windows in the east and north walls. The windows were hung with green cotton curtains. There were two beds, two bureaus, two easy chairs.

When Dolo left, I lay down and went to sleep.

I woke to a pale golden dusk flooding the room. I drowsed a little, then decided on a shower. I was stripped to my garter-belt and stockings when the door opened and a pretty Thai girl came bouncing in, out of breath and clutching a box of candy and a handbag.

Her thin black brows went up at sight of me sitting on the edge of the bed, rolling down a nylon. Then she giggled and closed the door gently behind her. She was wearing a mini-dress and high heeled shoes, there was a floppy-brimmed hat perched on top of her heavy black hair.

"I made it without Dolo seeing me," she giggled, leaning her back against the door. "I guess you're the new girl?"

"Guess I am," I nodded.

I liked Pheng Putar. Her moon face was very pretty, and she looked as if she might have a body under the mini-dress to match that of Lumm herself. Her legs were extremely shapely. I could easily understand why an Englishman would get the hots over her.

"Me for the shower," I told her. "Unless—?"

Her hand waved. "No, no. Go ahead. I'm just going to dream a little. My head's still spinning."

"Big date?" I asked, padding to the bathroom.

"Mmmm, with my sweetie."

She plopped down on the bed, lying back with a happy smile and closed eyes. She had removed the hat, it lay half-crumpled in her brown fist. I closed the bathroom door gently, leaving Pheng Putar to her dreams.

I thought about the Thai girl and her English adventurer. It was my job to find out about Johnny Meadows, while I was in Thailand to prevent the Prince from being killed. I knew from nothing about John Meadows, other than the fact that he worked for L.U.S.T. and had hidden the plans for the Red Chinese invasion of Thailand in a temple with a curse on it, somewhere on the Bolovens plateau, a highland in southern Laos.

Maybe the Englishman had known John Meadows. John Meadows, from what I knew of him from David Anderjanian, had been an adventurer himself, following hints and rumors about hidden treasure hoards and temple gold throughout Southeast Asia. Birds of a feather have been known to flock together, especially in an out-of-the-way place like Bangkok.

I thought about Bangkok, Thailand and Laos.

The history of this corner of Asia is a story of invasions, always from the north. In the past fifty centuries, or maybe even more, people had been trickling down out of China and the interior lands of Asia, southeastward into the Malay Peninsula.

First had come the Malayo-Polynesians; then, as if following the backwash of these people, the Funanese and Chams. The Khmers had come next, to build the great temples at Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom. The

Khmers had disappeared mysteriously, and the Lao and Thai people had taken their place. These were farmers, for the most part—fleeing from Chinese warlords even then—and they cultivated yams, bananas, breadfruit, fruit trees, and eventually, rice. Their domestic animals were chickens, pigs and dogs.

Much of the Thai and Laotian cultures are the same; the people have intermingled over the years, more noticeably in the less-civilized places. The Mekong river flows between Thailand and Laos, forming a natural border, before it sweeps down into Cambodia and through South Viet Nam, to empty into the South China Sea.

Today, Laos permits the Viet Cong to use its land for the Ho Chi Ming Trail, as well as its eastern mountains as a hideout for V.C. troops to make their assaults into Viet Nam. Laos is also plagued by Communist elements, despite its seeming friendliness with North Viet Nam. There has been heavy fighting between the Laotian army and these Viet Cong regiments over control of such Laotian towns as Pakse, Saravane and Attopeu.

Thailand has permitted the United States Air Force to build six air bases. Now, however, Thailand appeared to be nearing the danger mark as far as war with the Commies was concerned, because the Pathet Lao—a Commie guerrilla group—was up in arms in the north and trying to convert the Meo hill tribesmen to their cause. In the south, hard-core terrorists from Malaya were keeping the pot boiling by ambushing and killing police patrols, murdering teachers and government officials and spreading Communist propaganda.

The Prince was aware of this; he was trying to stop it. Without the help of General Thak Parphon, this was an almost impossible task. The General counseled patience, patience, not to make a move lest Thailand give

Red China an excuse to send its armies across the Tanen Mounrain range and along the Mekong River into its northernmost provinces.

If the Prince were dead, General Parphon would rule.

Then Thak Parphon might show his true colors and declare for Communism. Laos was already half-Commie country, North Viet Nam was completely in Communist hands, and—whammo! The great rice bowl of southeastern Asia would belong to Red China.

It would not take the Reds long to swing down into the Malaysian Peninsula and—who knows?—island-hop over Sumatra, Borneo, Java and the rest of Indonesia to Australia itself. It was a prospect that made my blood run a little cold.

I grabbed a towel and began rubbing. The sooner I got to work, the better. I wrapped the towel under my armpits and sauntered out into the bedroom. Pheng Putar was snoring very delicately.

I took advantage of her napping to open her handbag and search it. I found a wallet with about three hundred *baht* in it—roughly, fifteen dollars in Uncle Sam money—a few coins, a key, and half a dozen snapshots of Pheng Putar and a big, husky man in khaki shirt and jodphurs. There was an address hastily scratched on the back of a photograph, someplace on Rajdamnern Avenue.

I knew no more than I knew before, so I decided to wait until Pheng woke up. I discarded the towel and slipped into a robe. I polished my nails, I let them dry, I even took a bit of a catnap myself.

Pheng came back to life just as I was turning on the lamp. She yawned and stretched and asked, "Has Dolo been past, banging on doors?"

"Not yet," I smiled.

"Good. I have time for a quick shower."

"Tough day?" I asked casually.

"Was it ever! My boy friend was like wild. He just came out of the back country, less than a week ago. I guess his libido has been building for the past couple of months, because he comes on like that Chinese god Juggernaut in between the sheets."

She was lifting off the mini-dress, showing her ripe body in a black nylon brassiere and rather full hips in a matching pair of panties. I saw purple kiss marks on her sides, on her neck, on her inner thighs, of that type the French name *morsure*. Apparently the big English adventurer was quite a lover boy; it appeared that he had damn near tried to swallow her.

"What'll Dolo say when she sees those?" I asked.

"What? Ohhh—no!" Pheng wailed. "I told him to take it easy. Now look at me. I'm all marked up. Dolo will kill me!"

"Maybe not," I soothed her. "I have some pancake make-up, it ought to cover those hickies. I'm a good make-up girl, I think I can do it."

"Would you?" she cooed. "I'd be ever so grateful."

A grateful Pheng Putar might be just what I needed. I got out my Coty Blusher Kit and went to work. Where her neck showed purple, I painted some liquid foundation, pearl cream blusher, to be strictly accurate. I brushed her sides with the same thing.

She giggled when she parted her thighs so I could apply the body paint to her inner thighs. I could scarcely help but notice that her privacy was shaven clean. I remembered Lumm and her own hairlessness.

"Do all you girls depilate?" I wondered.

"What is depilate? I do not know."

My forefinger ran across her mons Veneris, making her squirm. "No hair, honey. Is it the custom of the house—I mean, the temple?"

Pheng giggled. "General Parphon adores the babylike look. He is real big on kissing. You know what I mean?"

I nodded my blonde head, thinking hard. I have studied the ways of men with women ever since I hit the age of puberty. It has been a hobby of mine. I understand the twelve love postures of Cyrene Dodecamachos, the advice given by Ovid in his *Art of Love*, I have read Arentino with the Giulio Romano illustrations, and oodles more. I have studied the many erotic plates of d'Nancarville's *Monuments de la Vie Privee des Douze Cesars*. I have practically memorized Aloysia Sigea.

A man who comes on strong for all this kissing is often a man who seeks to be dominated by a woman. There is a quirk in his nature—the psycho boys call it masochism—which causes him to get his biggest thrills by being ordered about, even being spanked or whipped, by a female. I hold no brief for or against this idiosyncrasy. We are what we are, and we are happiest on this earth while doing our thing.

If domination was his thing, I would be a dominatrix where Thak Parphon was concerned—if I ever got the chance. It might help me learn his plans. I was desperate, I would snatch at straws to stop that assassination.

"Pheng, I have an idea," I murmured. "Dolo tells me the General is always looking for new girls. You know, he's tired of the same old faces and bodies. I was wondering—suppose we make tomorrow night's show a little different?"

Her eyes got big. "Ooooh! How?"

I told her and she nodded eagerly, saying, "You'd better tell Dolo. She runs things around here."

Ten minutes later, when Dolo Hawkins rapped knuckles on our door, I opened it and beckoned her in. It took me about three minutes to convince her.

"It's a smashing idea. I'm for it. I'm sure Thak Parphon will like it, too—when he sees us perform. We've never done anything like that—it's always been the same old thing."

"We have until tomorrow night," I said. "We'll have to work, and work hard."

Dolo snapped, "Good. The girls need to shake their asses a little more, they're all getting fat." Her eyes were moving over Pheng at the moment, and Pheng was standing there stark naked.

For a moment I was afraid Dolo would notice the body paint over those purple hickies, but I had done a good job with the Coty Original, and she turned on her heel and went out, nodding her head and smiling.

Pheng clapped her hands gleefully. "It worked, Eve. She didn't notice a thing. I owe you a lot. She might have tossed me out of here, and I don't want that to happen. It's a good safe place to be in Bangkok, the way the city is now with the Pathet Lao coming out of the woodwork and making everybody's life miserable."

I thought of the time-worn phrase, and so I said it. "Tell me, honey—what's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?"

She doubled up, howling with laughter. "A girl has to live, I like to live good. My sister and I come from—"

"Your sister? Who's that?"

She shook her head. "Not here now, tell you about her later. But she and I were born and grew up in a little town way in the north, Phetchabun Changwat. We got tired of sitting on mats and spreading out tobacco leaves to cure in the sun, so we left and came to Bangkok."

Her pale brown shoulders moved in a shrug. "There are a lot of people in Bangkok, and we were just two more girls. So we did what other pretty girls do in

Bangkok. We hired ourselves a trysting boat, the kind with the blue burlap over it, that still travel up and down the few klongs that are left, hunting for customers.

"We did all right, but more and more girls are turning to the bars and coffee houses for their dates. Bangkok is very westernized now, you know. So we became bar girls and did even better because we did not have to pay rent for the trysting boat.

"A man who scouts the bars for pretty girls to amuse General Parphon saw us, offered us jobs here. I grabbed at the chance, but my sister went back to the north country to visit the folks. She'll be back any day now."

Pheng glanced at the Westclox alarm on a wall shelf. "Eeeeeh!" she squealed. "We'd better get dressed. Dolo won't like it if we're late for the feedbag. Besides, she'll probably want to make plans for our show tomorrow night."

Pheng reached for her *pa sin*.

Most Thai clothing—female wear, anyhow—is a blend of Chinese and Indian cultures, as well as that of all Southeast Asia. The *pa sin* is the traditional dress, consisting of a wraparound skirt, worn with a band of silk twisted about the torso, with a broad flap tossed over a shoulder. There is also the sarong of India, the T-jacket worn with pajama pants, the camisole which reaches from the shoulders to just below the waist, and the mandarin-type garment which is called *si dai* in Vietnamese.

I discovered I was right at home in a light cotton shift dress, however. As a matter of fact, Lumm and Pata wore almost the same thing. I had left off my stockings, as had they, but I had slid a pair of loafers on my tootsies.

Dolo explained our plan, to stage a show to please

masochists in the audience. They had never done such a thing, but she felt the General would be delighted with it, since it would be new and different.

"Eve suggests also that we wear masks," the English-woman went on. "The General knows our faces, so he may be intrigued enough to try and figure out what bodies belong to what faces, and to applaud and even give us a little more spending money."

The girls clapped wildly at that idea.

We spent that evening with me designing face masks and some of the girls stitching them together. They were half-cotton and frilled with lace. Old panties, old desses, furnished our materials. When we were done and put the masks on, even Dolo Hawkins had a hard job telling who was who. There were four blonde girls in the temple besides me. One was English, one was a German, two were from Sweden.

I went to bed hoping my inventiveness, to say nothing of my physical charms, would capture the attention of the General. Every so often, Pheng explained, he selected a girl to be his companion as he went to the night spots and the hotels of Bangkok. True, a girl rarely kept his attention for more than a few weeks, but if I couldn't find out what I wanted to learn in a couple of weeks, I didn't deserve to be taking L.U.S.T. pay.

All next day, with time out for naps, we rehearsed our little play. We needed a man for our subject, but Dolo promised we would have one, come curtain time. Some young man who delivered groceries to the love chapel, I think he was.

The plan changed when the General came, however.

We girls were gathered in the main chamber of the temple—the one with all the statues of the female Buddhas in their love postures—with cloaks covering us from necks to toes. Under the cloaks we were wearing

our stage costumes. We were masked, too, which proved to be a damn good thing for me.

The first man I saw was the Cherub.

I damn near died. The jig was up, I told myself. He would recognize me, point me out as a secret agent to Thak Parphon, and that would be the end of Eve Drum. Then I remembered I was wearing a mask.

Babyface had no idea of who I was. He beamed and simpered at all the females clustering around him. I gathered that his bosses had sent him posthaste to Bangkok to get the invasion plans in the Laotian temple. I dimpled and smiled at him, patted his hand, and thought like crazy.

The Cherub would make the perfect patsy for our little play, he was a real masochist, he liked being dominated, even whipped, by a woman. His antics when he was playing his role, would make it all the more realistic and, I hoped, more entertaining, for the General.

I sought out Dolo as the little cortège of men and women chosen as guests of Thak Parphon were led into the audience room.

“Did that delivery boy get here?” I asked.

“Not yet, but he promised he would.”

“I have an idea. Let’s ask for a volunteer!”

Dolo was horrified. “What? One of the General’s guests? They’re all important people! None of them would consider it.”

“Maybe one would—if the subject were broached the right way,” I murmured. “And I think I know the way.”

I slithered away from Dolo and hurried forward until I was standing close to Babyface. The other girls were all mingling with the guests, it was part of the traditional greeting that the General’s people always enjoyed. For a change, the girls were all bundled up in cloaks, however, and their pretty faces were hidden behind masks.

I had studied Thak Parphon as he entered. He was a stocky man with a round, moon face, a human bull with broad shoulders and a deep chest. He looked strong as hell, and I gathered from what the girls had told me that he was a real bull between the sheets, too. His somewhat full face had split with a grin when he saw the masks and cloaks. He was a smart cookie, he knew something was in the wind.

And so, feeling more confident, I brushed against the Cherub.

My hand caught his hand. I closed my fingers tightly, letting my sharp fingernails bite into his flesh. "Naughty boy," I breathed. "Would you like to be whipped?"

Poor Babyface! He thought it was all part of the show.

"Very much," he nodded, flushing, "if you do it."

"We need a volunteer for our play. The delivery boy who was to act the part didn't show up."

A girl was passing a tray with drinks. I reached for one, handed it to the Cherub. He swallowed the sazerac in one long gulp. My hand went out for another glass. I handed it to him and took away the empty.

A sazerac is a wicked blend of whiskey, Pernod and bitters. It is a potent potion, and it kicks the living hell out of your inhibitions. I know Russians are hardy drinkers, but they are accustomed to potato vodka, and the sazerac has none of that in it.

I watched the Cherub get red in the face as he downed his second. I handed him a third. At the same time I whispered, "You get to do your thing, honey!"

"In front of everybody?"

"Think of all the girls in the show—all yours!"

"*Blegadaryu*," he bleated.

"I'll ask for a volunteer," I told him. "You nod."

I left him finishing his third sazerac.

CHAPTER THREE

I stepped out from behind the curtains on the little stage that was part of the audience room. The General and his guests were seated at four tables grouped about the stage. They were half-loaded, they beamed and clapped.

“We need a man,” I caroled, “a real man—to play a part in our little tableau. Will someone please volunteer?”

Thak Parphon looked up with a big grin. For one wild moment, I was afraid he was going to offer himself. I couldn’t see whipping the most powerful man in Thailand. So I hurriedly pointed a quivering finger at the Cherub.

“The young gentleman signaling me is perfect for the part!” I yelled. “I saw him nodding his head.”

The General hesitated only a moment. Though it is true he worked with the Communists, I think that deep down he was afraid of them and resentful of their interference in the internal affairs of his country. Alone, he might have carried out his coup, but there were always the Pathet Lao to consider, and the Pathet Lao guerrillas took their orders from Moscow and Peking. I figured he might delight in seeing a Russian secret agent publicly humiliated.

The general clapped his hands.

“Igor Stamskovich,” he yelled. “Our hero!”

The Cherub nodded as he tried to rise. He was not functioning well, thanks to the sazeracs; he smiled agreeably and went on bobbing his head up and down. The General put an arm under his elbow.

“We have never had any of our guests so honored,

comrade," he shouted enthusiastically. "The girls are very jealous of their little shows. To be selected to take part is like having a medal pinned to your chest."

Igor Stamskovich made it to his feet. I ran down the little steps and went to take his arm, to lead him stageward. I whispered, "We're going to tie you up and tease you a little, but you'll like that. Afterward, you get your pick of the girls."

The Cherub beamed.

I brought him behind the curtain and led him to a wooden beam with manacles bolted to it, and a chain that descended from the ceiling. He stared at it with blurry vision and began shaking his head.

Dolo Hawkins was close by, wringing her hands. "I don't think this is such a good idea, the delivery boy will still show up," she whispered.

"Undress," I snapped at Baby face, ignoring her.

My hand slapped him across the face. Something flickered into life deep inside him, a psychic need for such treatment. If I hadn't had this boy tied to bed in Moscow and used a whip on him and if I hadn't seen with my own eyes how much he enjoyed this sort of thing, I might have been as fearful as Dolo.

I was gambling on my memory.

My memory was correct.

His fingers started undoing buttons. I went to help him, smiling flirtatiously up into his reddened face. "You will be tortured by pretty girls, Igor. They are going to whip you right in front of everybody. You are going to obey the girls, darling. Or you will be punished even more."

I don't think he understood it all; those sazeracs were sloshing around inside him by this time and the fumes of the whiskey and Pernod must have been hard at work. But he nodded and grinned as if loving every moment of it.

When he was naked, Pheng Putar came forward minus her cloak. Her costume was really nothing very much. She wore golden sandals on her feet and a golden chain about her middle. Her breasts were naked, the nipples tinted with lipstick. Her skin was soft, creamy.

Babyface stared at her, eyes wide.

Pheng said, "Oh, my. Look at that!"

"He's all man," I nodded. "Now give me a hand chaining him to that beam."

Pheng brushed her thighs against his prominence, getting close to him while she fitted the manacles on his wrists. She was giggling and teasing, and Igor sopped it all up. Lumm strolled over, staring at what made the Cherub a man. There was a kind of hate and disgust glowing in her eyes. I had already tabbed Lumm as a sapphist, so her man-hatred was understandable.

When Igor Stamskovich hung naked from the beam, it was time to start the show. The curtains switched back, and the viewers at the tables saw a darkened stage with a floodlight that revealed the Cherub in all his male nakedness.

I heard gasps and little cries.

But—nobody protested.

Gradually the lights went up, the stage grew bright, and we girls were revealed as part of the court of Hippolyte, queen of the Amazons. The queen was played by a Swedish girl—her name was Helga—while us other girls were members of her entourage.

Her girl guards had caught a Peeping Tom: the Cherub.

And now her female executioners were about to punish the voyeur for his desecration. Lumm was one of the executioners, naked except for a broad leather belt from which hung half a dozen kinds of whips. The other executioner was the German girl—Gerta—also wearing a whip-belt and mask with her golden sandals. They

stood on either side of the wooden beam from which the Cherub hung.

On her silver throne, Hippolyte sat staring at the victim, a dimpled chin resting on her thick brunette hair—she was otherwise naked—she portrayed the regal, angry queen to perfection. Her nostrils quivered with royal anger, her brown hair made a perfect foil for the imitation jewels in her hair. Her mask was of silver foil.

“So! You have desecrated the holy temples of the Amazons, you have spied on their nakedness. The punishment for this is death—but being an understanding woman, I shall make that death as pleasant as possible.”

Her hands clapped. A girl dressed in an evening gown came sauntering onto the stage. This was yours truly, Eve Drum. I wore a simple domino mask with lace frills that hid my cheeks.

“Strip for him, my dear. It seems to be what he enjoys!”

The two executioners reached to their broad leather belts, lifting long peacock feathers. They began dragging the soft fronds of the feathers all along the Cherub’s straining body as I lowered an evening gown strap.

There wasn’t a sound from the onlookers. They knew what they were going to see, and they thrilled to the idea.

My evening gown strap fell. I reached into the bodice and lifted out a breast. I walked with swaying hips toward the chained Cherub. His eyes were fastened to my bouncing breast as the feathers stroked down his chest. His veins were corded, his breathing was harsh, difficult.

I slid my nipple around on his chest while the feathers worked lower.

Babyface made sounds indicative of the fact that he

was enjoying every moment of this erotic execution. He had forgotten he was on stage. The sazeracs, plus our stagemanship, plus the powerful lights around the rim of the proscenium that hid the audience from view, had shut him into a make-believe world.

I slithered out of the upper half of my evening gown. I was naked from my navel up, and now I went around the Cherub slowly, mashing my breasts against his chest, dragging my nipples across his belly. He was sobbing, the feathers were getting in their swipes at his arousal, and he was ready to climb walls.

I turned to the audience and began the shimmy, holding my arms out at my sides, letting my shoulders go for broke. My breasts whirled and jounced, they bobbed and flew. I laughed down at the audience whom I could see dimly in the darkness.

Hands began to clap. I strutted across the stage, doing the stripper bit, letting my evening gown hang from my middle while I slowly removed one long glove and then the other.

"Fais vite! Fais vite!" shouted the General hoarsely, telling me to speed it up. Obviously, he wanted to see more of the goodies.

I took my own sweet time. Where a man is concerned it never pays to rush things. Let him sweat a little. Behind me, Igor Stamskovich was groaning now, staring at my creamy back while those peacock feathers tickled, tickled, tickled. I am afraid I gawked a little at sight of him, he was really up tight about all this.

But I was not so much interested in Igor Stamskovich as I was in the General. Thak Parphon was leaning forward, his moon face red with the blood pounding through his body. A vein in the middle of his forehead was swollen huge and purple. His tongue was practically hanging out.

Thak may have been puzzled by the identity of the

performers, with the masks on, and this may have increased his libido level, but one thing was for sure. The way he was gaping at me told my feminine intuition he knew damn well he had never seen *my* bod before. It was something new and different and he was like a pointer sighting a quail with his tail out and stiff.

I leaned over as close to his table as I could, I let my breasts sway and shake as they dangled. His eyes popped. I tossed him one of my gloves. Then I hooked my thumbs in the evening gown bunched at my middle and worked it down a little so that he could see my navel and the strap of my fancy black garterbelt together with a few creases of my plump little belly.

Honest, I thought he'd die. He got halfway to his feet, then he must have remembered where he was, because he sank down into his chair again. His right hand was balled into a fist.

"*Fais vite,*" he bellowed. "*D'arrassez-vous!* Take it off!"

I winked at him and laughed softly. When the gown was at my hips, I turned around. He could see the beginning swells of my buttocks and the dimple of the crease. I wagged my hips, I shoved out my creamy behind, and pushed the gown down.

The General applauded lustily. So did his guests. I took it as a compliment, so I turned around, letting the evening gown fall some more, and gave them a real good look. I was wearing nylon stockings, a garterbelt and my high-heeled stripper shoes. No more.

Off to one side, the Cherub was making gurgling sounds. Lumm and Pheng were whipping him now, and he was writhing and twisting, trying to tear his wrists free of the manacles, his eyes mesmerized by my body.

The message was getting to the General, too.

He was seeing himself tied up and teased, and he was loving the idea. The thought came to me that maybe, in

some such way, I could break him down and get him to tell me—in an indirect manner, of course, I didn't expect him to blurt it out—when the assassination was supposed to take place.

And so I strutted over to the Cherub and while Lumm and Pheng whipped him, I took over the peacock feathers.

“Would ums like to be free, baby boy?” I cooed.

“*Da! Yes, yes! Da, da!*” he howled, writhing.

“Him is a bad boy! Him must be punished!”

I tickled some more, risking a glance at the General who was standing now, staring and licking his lips. He was actually shaking in his excitement.

“Enough,” he called suddenly, waving an arm.

Next moment he was running up the stage steps, off to one side, and bearing down on me. I gave a scream, paused for a moment, and then started to run off into the wings with Thak Parphon pounding along behind me.

The rest of the guests were whooping it up, running onto the stage and chasing the performers. I was too busy trying to evade the General to get a good look at what was going on. However I did see Lumm and a pretty Thai woman locked in an embrace; and one of the men, with Pheng, beginning a public performance right there in the stagelights.

I let the General catch me close to the hall door. He put his arms about me, smothering my lips and neck with kisses.

“You are adorable, adorable!” he panted. “Who are you?”

I giggled, “I’m Lap Hai’s property.”

He drew away a second, in surprise, “Lap Hai?”

“He found me on a Paris stage, and hired me for his pleasure girl.” I shrugged, letting my breasts rub against his front so he could tell how hard they had become and

how stiff my nipples were. "He will pay me three hundred American dollars the week. This good money."

Thak Parphon snorted. "Don't be an idiot. Three hundred dollars! I will pay you five hundred—for as long as you please me."

I pouted, and catching his flushed cheeks between my palms, drew his lips down across the upper bulges of my breasts. He needed no further hint, he began kissing my nipples while I whispered over his head, off the top of my skull, "Actually, I am to be a present to the Prince."

Thak stiffened. I admit I was gambling here, but being a secret agent for L.U.S.T. means your whole life is one continual risk. He might have suspected a trick, realizing I would be a spy, but, at the moment he was too concerned with my breasts and my nipples to do any clear-headed rationalization. His lips were hot and wet.

"Pah," he breathed between kisses. "Forget the Prince!"

"I would love to, dear General—but if the Prince likes me, he will pay me those three hundred dollars a week to be his *hastini*."

The General chuckled, drawing away with a supreme wrench of his will power. Face purple, that swollen vein even more noticeable now that he had been so close to me, he managed to gasp out a few words.

"The Prince's star is fading, he will never be able to enjoy your charms, believe me. Now my star is rising, I will be able to cover you with mink coats and diamonds, if you are as good as I believe you can be."

I ran my fingertip across his somewhat thick lips. "I know the forbidden caresses of Elephantis, the postures of the Duodecatechmon. I have made a study of sex lore, my darling General—and I wouldn't want to waste

that knowledge on somebody who wouldn't appreciate it."

His eyes blazed at me. "You shall teach me—but not here! No, we must have privacy, eh? You and I, alone in my villa, for a few days?" He added, seeing my hesitancy, "I shall pay you five thousand dollars as a—retainer."

"I've never been made love to by a Prince," I pointed out.

His grin was sly. "I shall tell you why the Prince will never appreciate your charms, my dear. But, as I say, not here. Come, fetch your evening gown."

"You fetch it," I purred.

If I was right in my surmise about this man, he would leap at the opportunity to serve me, to wait on me. The man who enjoys being dominated by a woman is conditioned to this servitude, usually by being raised by a forceful female, mother or aunt or governess. Our world has known many matriarchal societies where the woman rules, so it must be an ingrained psychosis of many men. In order to have his sexual desires gratified, a male will submit to the female yoke. If this had been his sole method of attaining love and affection, he slides easily into such a behavior pattern. The General loved being ordered about by a dominatrix.

He trotted past the wiggling, writhing bodies on the stage and picked up my evening gown. It is strange about men and their sexual needs. Here was a man—the power behind the throne, so to speak, a big noise in his country—who was running errands for a mere pleasure girl. And getting a high-voltage charge out of it.

I let him hold the gown over my bod while I lifted my arms so he could draw the gown down over my size 38s and help me wriggle it past my hips. Then I threw my arms around him and gave him a reward kiss. This

was evidence of the fact that when he obeyed me, he got the love and affection he needed.

Catching my elbow with his hand, he got me out of the temple at a half-run. A Cadillac was waiting in the courtyard. Thak handed me into it, then bounced in beside me. An impassive Thai chauffeur threw the car into gear and we were off.

Bangkok is a town that really swings at night. There are night clubs all over the place, mostly concentrated along Rajdamnern Avenue, where they vie with local bars and massage parlors for the male trade. You can find pretty girls at every one of these establishments, waiting to serve the pleasures of the males. For two hundred *baht*—ten American dollars—you can get one of the girls to go to be with you, if you are so inclined.

Somebody like Thak Parphon paid more for his entertainment. Well, the girls he chose were above the average in looks and love wisdom. Or so I like to think.

The Cadillac sped through the neon-lighted streets, passing a Buddhist temple lifting its *chedis* toward the moon, and the huge Phra Mane Ground where food stalls were set up and soccer games played on holidays. I did not get as good a look at the scenery as I might have liked; the General was all over me with his hands, having a feel day.

I fought him off a little but not too vigorously. I wanted to keep the water boiling in the pressure cooker. He had to be at the explosion point when I went to work on him. My job was to reduce him to a mindless automaton intent only on getting the goodies he needed so desperately.

"You are a love goddess," he panted to my lips between kisses. "I live only to worship you!"

"You're my love slave," I told him breathlessly.

"Yes, your slave! Command me, my Venus!"

Stuff like that. He ate it up.

I had him drooling over my breasts which were litsed out of my evening gown for him to feast on. He vowed they were the loveliest *cousins* he had ever seen. I tried to keep a clear head, because I had to be in control of the situation if I was going to find out anything about the assassination plans, but he was hanging me up with his caresses and his panted words of adoration.

General Thak Parphon was what the French call a *courailleur*, a man who is well versed in making love to women, and in causing women to enjoy that love-making. His hands were gentle, sliding up my stockinged thighs and onto my smooth bare thighflesh. His lips were adept at ferreting out the erogenous zones of a female, his tongue licked my shaven armpits and my rigid nipples. Nobody but nobody can take much of this sort of thing without responding in a physical way.

Sure, I faked it a little—I made him think I was out of my skull for want of him. I squirmed and moaned, I pleaded, I told him he was a regular Adonis, a kind of love god in his own right. He ate it up.

The Caddy finally pulled up in front of a big villa that was set back about a hundred yards off the main road just outside the city proper. There were trees, a neatly tended lawn and carefully pruned bushes. The bright Thai moon turned it into a heavenly haven for a man with the hots. It was very romantic.

The air was filled with the scent of sandalwood, the gravelled driveway crunched almost melodiously under out shoes. The General had an arm about my middle and was planting kisses on my bare shoulder and upper arm as he led me through the front doorway into a house furnished in exquisite taste.

I got a quick glimpse of gilded and lacquered statuettes ranged on either side of the hall as Thak hurried me past bronze bas-reliefs of the Angkor Wat temples and a carved-wood standing screen toward the big

staircase. I ran up the steps ahead of him, lifting my black satin evening-gown skirt up above my knees for easier running.

The General appreciated my shapely legs. He dragged me down three treads from the top, to slobber kisses up and down my calves and thighs. When his lips reached up above my stocking vamps, I had to shove him away.

“Please, you’re getting me wild . . . you just don’t know how exciting your lips are, my Adonis . . . you must let me go . . . I really should have a bath . . . or at least a shower, to wash away the love sweats you caused. . . .”

“I shall bathe you,” he panted.

“As my love slave?” I wheedled.

“Yes, yes—order me. Command me!”

He fairly groveled at my feet, rubbing his face against my legs. I drew his lips up to my mouth, kissed him.

“Then, come—lead me to our bed,” I breathed.

His bedroom was huge, twenty feet by twelve, and was filled with a rare collection of erotic art. There were paintings of the folk hero of India, Rama, enjoying five naked females at one time, of princes and their ladies sprawled on a rug on a palace terrace, making love by the light of a warm summer moon. Hung beside these paintings were copies of the statues to be found on the Indian temples, done in such perfect detail that they took away the breath.

I had no time to study the art work. Thak Parphon was grabbing me, about to throw me down on the huge bed.

“Easy, easy,” I cautioned him. “Let’s go about this the way it began. You are my love slave. Is this the way a slave treats his mistress?”

“What do you want me to do?”

"Strip! Take off your clothes in front of me. I want to see if you are man enough to please a goddess."

His eyes blazed with delight. With shaking hands he yanked off his coat, his shirt and tie. In seconds he was naked before me, standing proudly. His was a good body, a little too heavy, but powerful with thick muscles rolling beneath a layer of fat.

The fat was due to good living. The prominence of his male member was due to the years of good loving he had given uncounted women. They say if you do not use an organ of the body it will atrophy. Just the opposite seemed to be the case with Thak Parphon. Much use had turned him into a stallion man.

I sighed, "You tempt me. If you were the Prince —"

Anger glinted in his eyes. "Forget the Prince! I tell you he is finished. You're wasting your time, thinking about him."

I pretended confusion. "But Lap Hai said —"

"You must forget Lap Hai, too. You do not understand our politics. In time, I hope you shall. Right now, it is important that you put your trust in me."

I dared not try his patience too far.

I snapped, as if I were his ruler, "Undress me! Hurry!"

He knelt to lift my gown him, kissing my stockinginged feet and ankles. Upward came the skirt, upward roved his kisses. When he got to my bare thighs he kind of lost his head. His hands snaked up to grip my bare buttocks and he pastured his lips and tongue all over my quivering thighmeat.

He teased, he would not venture near my privacy.

Oh, he was one smart lover. He knew how to build a girl up. I did not want to cool him, I did want to drive him even battier.

"The ba-bath," I whimpered. "A goddess must be

clean for her lover. I command you, General—a shower, at least!"

He drew back, red of face and fiery of flesh. He nodded slowly, "The shower, yes. I myself will bathe you."

He lifted off the evening gown, unstrapped my garterbelt, rolled down my stockings. His hands removed my shoes. Naked, he led an equally naked me into a tiled bathroom with Crane fittings, done in purple and white tile. Gold faucets and golden accessories turned it into something that might have pleased a Roman emperor.

He adjusted the shower to a perfect warmth. Then he reached for soap and a facecloth. He washed me carefully, spending time on my somewhat swollen breasts and on my loins.

Repression of his desires was turning him into a kind of demigod, himself. He was gigantic in his amatory mood. I think Thak Parphon was going gung ho on this delaying process, he knew what it was doing to him, and that he would be better prepared for the final *rompre une lance* when it came time for that.

I used my hands to wash his body, as well, teasing him all the time, brushing my breasts and buttocks against him, letting him know the feel of my legs clenched about his thigh. He was just about delirious when we stumbled from the bathroom wrapped in heavy towels, and headed for the bed.

His hands grabbed my towel, yanked it loose.

Naked, I fled for the great four-poster which is where General Thak Parphon did his thing. I landed on it with him half on top of me.

"Half a mo, love," I panted as he started kissing any part of me he could reach. "Tell me more about the Prince. What makes you so sure he's finished?"

"Because I tell you he is," he rasped.

"Now you're mad," I pouted. "A slave doesn't get mad at his mistress, does he?"

I slithered down on the bed, where he gave evidence that he was quite a man. My fingers went out, I indulged in what the Arab love books call *zerq* and which the French name *se passer d'hommes*. The General groaned and jerked.

"I—I'm not mad," he panted, shaking as if he had a chill. "Three days from now, I'll let you talk to somebody who can con-confirmed what I'm telling you."

My fingernails played at spiders' legs. I asked, "Who?"

"The *bhikku!* The Monk," he screamed.

I did not dare ask any more questions. In my head, even as I let the General turn me and widen my thighs, I began to add two and two. The assassination attempt would be a *fait accompli* three days from now, if Thak Parphon could be so specific about time. The Monk was undoubtedly the name of the would-be murderer.

It was little enough to go on.

It would have to do.

The General pumped and pushed at me as if he were a schoolboy with his first lay. There was no finesse, I rather imagine I had goaded him into a state of complete savagery. All he needed now was release.

He shook in the spasms of the sweet death, the *go-kuraku-ojo* of the Japanese. His teeth were fastened in my shoulder, his fingers clutched my buttockflesh.

A few seconds he lay on me, gasping hoarsely, before rolling off. He lay there, about to sleep. But I was having none of that. My palm slapped his brown belly.

"Wake up, lover, I've just begun to play."

"I'm tired," he muttered.

"You only think you're tired. I have ways and means. The forbidden caresses of Elephantis, remember? I haven't tried those in a long time. You'll like them."

They're really off on another world. You haven't lived if you haven't felt them. Now get up on your hands and knees for a starter. . . ."

Four hours later, the General collapsed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dawn was tinting the tall spire of the Temple of Dawn that looks out over all of Bangkok with a golden flame when Thak Parphon began to snore. He had outdone himself, this past night, he had proven to be a veritable giant between the sheets. Now he needed his rest, he was no longer as young as he liked to think.

Me, I was *boire-bushed*, myself.

I would have dearly loved to roll over beside Thak and fall into a deep slumber. But I had other things to do. I had to find the man Thak called the Monk, and I had no idea as to how to go about it. The first thing that needed my attention was getting the hell out of the villa.

I grabbed for my evening gown and slithered it down over my curves. I would not wait to don my nylons and garterbelt, let the General keep them as souvenirs of an unforgettable night. My feet I slipped into my high heeled shoes, and snatched up my handbag.

I tiptoed out of the bedroom and down the hall. If there were any servants in the villa, they were all sound asleep in this early hour of the morning. I opened the front door and peeped out. All I saw, besides the trees and the flowering shrubs, was the Cadillac.

It was too much to hope that the chauffeur would have left the key in the ignition, but I had a remedy for that. I lifted the hood, crossed a couple of wires, and the big engine purred to life.

Then I got in the Caddy and drove off.

I knew the hue and cry would be up after me, damn soon. Just about as soon, as a matter of fact, as it took the General to wake up. He would find me missing, and not being a depe, he would remember that he had told me some very important information. He would also realize that it might be better for him if I were dead.

I gunned the Caldy down roads and streets completely unfamiliar to me. I had a rendezvous in mind, but I had no idea where in Bangkok it was. And not being able to speak or read the Thai language, I was more than at a disadvantage. I was practically dumb and blind.

I must have wandered over half of Bangkok before I found a policeman, one of those military-looking men in a khaki uniform and a cap with a red band around it, a holstered revolver at his hip. Luckily for me, he talked a little English.

"Rajdamnern Avenue?" I asked.

He gave me directions with a waving hand and a mixture of pidgin English and Thai. I gathered that it was not too far, maybe a mile or so. I had to go past the Grand Palace and the National Assembly building, I was to look for a lot of office buildings scattered in among some night clubs like the Moulin Rouge and the Alexandra.

I was off in a cloud of dust.

Half an hour later I was parking the Cadillac by the curb. I didn't care whether they gave out parking tickets in Bangkok or not, the fine would be paid by General Thak Parphon, who owned the car. I made a beeline for some rooming houses along Rajdamnern Avenue.

I was remembering the photographs that had been inside Pheng Putar's handbag when I'd examined it in the Temple of the Curious Caresses when she had been sleeping. There had been an address on the back of one of those pictures. I was gambling that address was

where Pheng and her English adventurer shared a room while he was in Bangkok.

I ran up wooden steps, I pushed a door open.

A hallway with a staircase rose up in front of me. To my right was a letter box marked with names. I scanned the names. Neal Harding. I paused at that one, nodding. It was the only English name of the lot. There were seven Thai names, one Indian, one Chinese, and three French. According to the letter box, Neal Harding was living in room 2B.

I went up the stairs and knocked at 2B.

After a few moments, the door was opened by a big man with a lot of shaggy brown hair on his head and the makings of a beard on his prominent jaw. His blue eyes opened wide at the sight of me in my black satin evening gown and high heeled shoes, clutching a black evening bag by Munro.

A slow grin curved his sensual mouth as he rubbed a hand across his hairy chest. "Well, now, ducks—what can I do for you?"

"Do you know Pheng Putar?"

"I do. Has anything happened to her?"

I shook my head. "No, but I want to talk to her. You see, I'm—er—employed at the same temple where she works and—"

He chuckled and opened the door wider. "Are you now? Well, come in then, and welcome." His eyes ran over my body under the black satin and I knew damn well he knew I had nothing on under it.

"She will be in, a little later?" I pressed.

"She will that. I'm expecting her." His grin was infectious. "I've been resting up for her, she's a regular wildcat, little Pheng is. I have a good night's sleep under my belt and—"

His wink was positively lewd.

I said as casually as I could, "I want to ask her something."

"Anything I can help you with, pet?"

"I'm afraid not—unless you know someone called the Monk?"

He shook his head, idly scratching his brown hair. He was a big one, this English adventurer, almost as big and as heavily muscled as David Anderjanian. A mat of brown hair grew thick on his wide, deep chest. His body from the navel up, which was all I could see of it, was heavily tanned, with a touch or two of scars like embroidery-work on it. He was all animal and sex appeal, this Neal Harding, and I was betting he had the morals of an amorous mink.

"Care for a spot of tea? Eggs?" he asked.

"I'm not hungry—well, yes, I am, I guess. I'll whip up the eggs if you'll make the tea."

"Smart girl. Americans can't make tea—you are American, aren't you?" At my nod he turned his naked back and walked ahead of me into a tiny kitchenette. "No offense, you know. Just a matter of strict reporting."

"Sure, like the English make lousy coffee." My national pride was hurt, I guess, but he only laughed and shook his head.

"You're right there. If you can make good coffee, I'd like a cup of that, maybe, instead of tea. I can make tea any time. Isn't often when I'm offered good coffee."

So I, like a dope, made the whole breakfast.

We ate like old friends, I told him I had been hired for a touring show that had broken up in Bangkok, and that I had been taken on at the Temple of the Curious Caresses to put some greenbacks back in my wallet.

Neal Harding was after a big emerald named the Eye of Buddha, he confided.

"Ducks, if I can put my hands on that stone, I'm set

for life. Bigger than the fabulous Grand Duke Boris emerald, rumor has it."

"Won't the owner object? Or do you intend to buy it?"

He snorted. "Buy it? From whom, pet? It's there for the taking. All a man needs is the guts, and I have plenty of that. Ought to fetch half a million American dollars. Plenty to set me up like a king."

His eyes dipped into the low bodice of my evening gown, where my breasts hung naked, their bulging sides and valley in view. I was hunched a little forward over my coffee cup, listening to him. I let him look even when I saw he was getting ideas.

His cheeks puffed out as he blew soundlessly through his lips. "I say, ducks—if you can't find this Monk man you're after, why don't you and I—"

The door opened just then, and closed.

Pheng Putar called, "Neal? Neal darling?"

"In the kitchen, pet. Come and see."

Pheng Putar came running but she slid to a stop at sight of me. Her face got pale and her eyes grew big. "Eve! Oh my God! Do you know the Thai army is looking for you—with orders to shoot to kill?"

I was silent, thinking furiously. Neal Harding was watching me with narrowed eyes. On the Bangkok streets, I would stand out like a sore thumb in my evening gown. And I had to go out on the streets if I hoped to prevent the Prince's assassination.

I asked, "Do you know who the Monk is?"

Pheng Putar drew a deep breath, then nodded. "Oh, yes. He is a very bad man, a man who kills other people for money, it is said."

I said, "I've got to kill him."

Neal Harding said, "Lor Blimey!" Pheng Putar merely gawked.

I spread my hands. "Look, I'll level with you. He's

going to kill the Prince. General Thak told me so. I'm being paid not to let that happen."

Sure, I was taking a chance. Pheng or her boy friend might see an opportunity to turn me in, to make themselves some money as informers. I had to take the risk. It was that or be caught on the Bangkok streets by an army patrol. Harding I was worried about, a little. He was an adventurer to whom the General's money would be as good as anything the United States mint turned out.

He was looking at me in an odd fashion. He said suddenly, "What are you, ducks—C.I.A. or N.S.A.?"

"Neither. I'm from L.U.S.T."

I had to take them both into my confidence. I really did need their help. I went on, "I've been thinking. If you could dye my skin brown, tint my hair, give me some old clothes, I might do what my job demands. I'd clear out of here fast, I wouldn't implicate either one of you."

Pheng Putar shook her head. "I can't do it. I'm afraid. Somehow, the General would find out and they'd kill me the way they did my sister."

I did a double take at that. "I thought your sister was up north with your family at Phetchabun Changwat?"

"So I thought until last night. That Russian you talked into acting with us told me she was dead. She was shot outside the Temple of the Thousand Deaths. Her name was Ogum Tarang."

Tears welled up in her eyes. I felt sorry for her, but I still had a job to do. Then a memory clicked into place. I asked, "Pheng—did your sister know a man named John Meadows?"

She nodded. "She was with him when she was killed. They met and fell in love. She went along with him when he stole something from the Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao were following them. The Russian said the

man, John Meadows, threw something into the temple. The Russian is out to get whatever it is."

"So am I," I nodded, "but first I've got to kill the Monk. Well, if you won't help me—"

"We'll help you," growled Harding.

Pheng turned her head, stared at him. "Neal—what are you saying? You know if the General finds out we've helped her, he'll have us shot."

"How will he know? Nobody knows she's here. Now do what I tell you. Get some dye and do her all over." His grin flashed as he added, "I'll even help you sort of make a party out of it."

Pheng looked stubborn, her eyes narrowing and her full red mouth thinning. Anger made her flush. I quickly said, "He's only kidding, Pheng. He loves you. You can do me all by yourself."

Her smile broke like sunshine through dark clouds. She nodded, shrugging her shoulders and tossing her handbag on the table. "Okay, I do. I got to go buy what I need, though."

I opened my purse, yanked out a roll of *bahts* from my wallet. I handed them to Pheng Putar. "Hurry back, honey. The Monk is going to make his try day after tomorrow. I don't have all that much time to find and kill him."

While she was gone, I took a shower and wrapped up in a big bath towel. I figured I might as well be ready to tint as soon as Pheng returned. Neal Harding was all for coming in the bathtub with me, but I found a lock on the door and bolted it. When I heard the front door open and close, I walked out barefoot in the towel.

Pheng tossed me two bottles. "You hold. I get ready."

She got ready by lifting her street dress off over her head. Outside of a garterbelt and her shoes and nylons, she was stark naked. She grinned as Neal whistled, and

made her walk toward me and the bathroom—a thing of sexual invitation.

“What do you say I help?” asked the ever-hopeful Harding.

“You keep bubble,” said Pheng cheerfully. “I do.”

She paused to put a foot on a chair and undo her garter-clasps. She was poised about three feet from her staring boy friend, whose stare swept up her bare thighs and into her shaven privacy. She grinned at me and winked.

“He bubble for sure,” she laughed happily, rolling down her nylons.

I did not blame him for staring. Her body was mocha magnificence. She tossed one stocking over a chair, then started rolling down the other. Her large breasts drooped, swaying lazily. I noticed that her nipples were stiff, indicating she herself was aroused by this blatant display of her nudity.

The Englishman reached for her; she whooped laughter and ran, buttockmeat shaking loosely. I grinned in sympathy at the big adventurer. Pheng Putar was something of a tease, I gathered.

In the bathroom, I let the towel drop as Pheng poured a palmful of thick oil into her hand. She said, studying my own nakedness, “Is shame to spoil, but if got to do, I will.”

The oil was warm, soothing, as she ran it over my shoulders and then up about my face. Her fingertips were gentle as they stroked the pigmentation into my pores. She was standing close to me, I felt the brush of her rigid nipples against my breasts when she moved. Her belly touched mine, her thighs seemed almost to caress me.

I started to breathe faster, and it was then that I noticed she was panting herself. I guess caressing a female body was something she had never done, or even

thought about. Or maybe she had, I didn't know too much about the Thai girl.

When my face was finished, she let her hands drop to my chest, smoothing more oil over my upper breasts. Her fingers lingered as they slid lower on my full teats, and her mouth opened to help her breathe as she worked the stuff into my mammarys. I think she knew she was getting to me, I know damn well that her hands, playing around with my outstanding attractions, were putting red-hot lances into her own libido.

Her forefingers and thumbs gripped my nipples.

I stared into her face. Her eyes were lowered, admiring my swelling 38s. Her tonguetip came out, running around her lips.

"Hey," I whispered.

Her eyes lifted to mine. She was boldly amorous, her eyes blazed with the inner heat that troubled her loins. Her fingers and thumbs rotated my nipples, tugged on them.

She breathed, "My boy friend want me. Maybe I can get so I want him. I'm tired from last night, but maybe not too tired. Let me."

Her head bent, she put her loose wet lips to my nipple and kissed it hungrily. An instant later, my nipple was in her mouth and she was drawing on it like a hungry babe. She went to the other breast, and her cheeks hollowed.

My hands caught her head, moved it deeper into my bloated breast. "Honey, if you want to play---go ahead. But keep those hands moving, you know?"

I felt I owed her this much, so I played along with her. I reached out to catch her breasts and bounced them on my palms, I ran my caressing fingertips over their sleek, full flesh. I teased her big nipples.

Pheng went on smearing me with oil, my breasts, down my sides and onto my belly. She panted, "Got to

do you all, Eve. If you fall down, if your skirts fly up, can give the game away if somebody sees white skin."

Well, that could happen. She pushed me onto the toilet seat, the top was down, and now she knelt to take my foot into her hands. She bathed it and my ankle and calf with oil. She did the same to the other leg. When she reached my thighs, she took even more time to rub me.

I saw she was looking into my crotch. I whispered, "Dolo told me you were regular, honey."

She nodded. "I am. I just like play around, get hot for him. You know?"

I guess I did. This was verboten play for Pheng Putar and so, being human, it was that much more exhilarating. She ran her oil-slick palms along my soft under-thighs, over my inner thighs. I was turning into a native girl, I saw. The skin was browning as the oil ate into my pores.

Her palms slid up to my crotch, working in the oil. Glancing down between my hardened breasts, I saw my thighs splayed open and the kneeling Pheng Putar crouched between them, her eyes fixed on my femininity. Her mouth drooped as if to kiss, and her nostrils flared.

"You pretty there," she breathed. Then she giggled, raising her eyes to mine, "But no good for native Thai girl with golden hair. Me shave!"

"No, honey—listen! How about tinting it?"

"Tint hair on head, not there," she declared. "Me shave!"

She ran for the shaving cream and a brush, plus razor. I said, "Now look. I can't sit here and let you shave off my muff, sweetie. I—"

Pheng was getting down between my legs again, lifting the shaving cream can, squirting it. She had a rich

lather in a matter of seconds. Dipping the brush in hot water, she ran it over my pubic mound.

Then she lifted the Schick injector and putting it on my flesh, drew the blade downward. I heard the scrape of the steel edge. My golden puff was vanishing under her deft strokings.

Hair on the human body is there to protect it from buffets on sensitive parts, like the head and the genitals. In past ages, this hair was all over the human body, as a barrier against the cold, in those days before people wore clothes. Due to our civilized ways of life, most body hair was atrophied out of existence.

There is another theory about body hair, namely, that it helps to distinguish the sexes. As a male lion has a mane, so a male human has a beard. This hirsute decoration is thought to enhance the attractiveness between the sexes. The female pubic hair, for instance, usually travels in a straight line, or a slightly humped line, just above the mons Veneris. The male hairiness usually extends up to, if not beyond, the navel.

In past ages, when religion seemed to be more down-to-earth than it is at the present time, the female triangle was thought to be holy. It became a sacred symbol. In ancient Egypt, the goddess Netpe was most noted for her sacred delta.

The abracadabra charm, a triangle with the letters of this word arranged so it could be read across and from top to bottom, was a protection against disease and misfortune. The female pubes, together with the womanly breasts, are man's erotic goals. Early man was closer to nature than we are today, he made fetishes out of the things that were dear to him.

As the centuries passed, wily courtesans and other knowledgeable women began to depilate their pubic hair. They shaved it or rubbed salves over it to make it disappear. Some women trimmed it neatly with razors.

The sacred triangle shifted upward to include the nipples and the vulvar dimple.

Oriental women, who cherish sex and are more understanding of its powerful appeal to human beings than occidental females, have removed their body hair for many centuries. In ancient Egypt, the women wore transparent garments so that their pubic deltas might be seen by men. They also made their femininity more attractive by the use of perfumes.

I thought about all this while Pheng Putar was scraping away with the Schick. There is another reason for the shaven pubes, of course: It makes it easier to employ the use of the mouth and tongue, as in lesbian love. I wondered if this was what the Thai girl had in mind.

But no. She just seemed to be teasing her libido.

When she was done, she poured some Hai Karate into her palm and smeared it over my baby skin mount.

"Yiiiiii!" I screeched, my behind lifting off the towel-covered toilet seat.

"Is smart a lot," nodded Pheng.

"Well, what the hell are you using it for, then?"

I knew without being told. Pheng saw the way her boy friend had looked at me, and was jealous. She didn't want to hurt me too much, like turning me over to General Thak Parphon, but she was determined to make me smart a little. And my poor, shaven mound sure did.

When the smarting stopped, she leaned forward and kissed it. Her wet tongue came out to lick and lave my hurt. It dipped into the pubic dimple a moment, sending wild chills racing from my toenails to the short hairs on the back of my neck. Her tongue worked hungrily for several long seconds.

"Better stop that, sweetie," I whispered.

"Is get you hot too?" she giggled.

"I'm not wood. What about you?"

"My boy friend know he got hold of something to-night. I all better from last night, you bet. Raring to go."

"Yeah. Well, you have him. I don't have anybody—so let up."

"Not finish," she said. "Got back to do. Stand up."

She finished in about half an hour, during which her clever fingertips roamed all over me from the nape of my neck to the backs of my heels. I was a brown beauty when she finally announced herself as satisfied.

"I'm glad you are," I snapped.

Me, I was suffering from gynelimia. I was hot, as the saying goes. I could not help the compulsive motion of my hips, nor could I prevent my thighs from squeezing together. Pheng was kneeling behind me, wiping off her hands on a towel.

She leaned and bit my right buttock, then laughed softly.

"You feel mean, Eve?"

"I will until I get some attention where I hurt."

"Good. You'll be in a mood to kill the Monk, then."

"I will that." I turned around, looked down at her. "What about this Monk, Pheng? Where'll I find him?"

"In an opium den on New Road."

"Where's that?"

"Five blocks to left after you leave here, three to right. The Heavenly Gate opium den, it's known as—though the sign reads only Heavenly Gate."

"Fine, so far. But how will I know him?"

"He wears the saffron robe of a Buddhist priest."

"Is he a Buddhist priest?"

Her sharp glance made fun of my ignorance. "Of course not! He is a very bad person, this *bikkhu*, so he make fun of religion by wearing monk robe while he do bad things."

The Monk had a hang-up, it seems. I made a mental

note of the fact. You never know when something like this may come in handy.

"Now, about my dress," I hinted.

Pheng nodded. "Yes. Need native clothes. You come."

Stark-naked, she led the way out of the bathroom. I followed, more modestly arrayed in the bath towel. Neal Harding was standing in the kitchen doorway, hoisting a water glass loaded with scotch.

"Hey, you do look different," he hailed me. "But what about your hair?"

"Take time do that," Pheng murmured. "I get her started, then I come and get you started."

Neal raised his glass high. "I'll drink to that, love."

Pheng listed out a *pa sin* of brightly flowered print cotton. She showed me how to wrap myself in it from the hips down so that there was enough left over to drape above my left shoulder. I would wear a white cotton chemise with it, to cover me from the navel upward.

"You take in bathroom," Pheng hinted.

I caught wise. Pheng and Neal would be very busy in the bedroom when my hair was being tinted the right shade. I sighed. I obeyed orders and went into the bathroom, where I started running the hot water.

Two and a half hours later, my hair was a rich brown. As I stared into the mirror, I would never have recognized myself. I was somebody else, what with my darker skin tones and my long brown hair. I really did look something like a native Thai girl.

A haggard somebody else, at that. For those two and a half hours, I had tried to shut my ears to the giggles, the squeals, the bull bellows, the screeches, that were coming through the tissue paper walls from the bedroom where Pheng Putar and her big Englishman were

bumping bellies and whatever other portions of their anatomies that happened to be handy.

I am not a coprolaliac. I do not get my kicks from listening to certain erotic words or to words breathed out in a fit of passion. Yet I must admit that they did have a certain erotic effect on my system. I could do nothing about the effect, so I just suffered in silence.

The couple in the bedroom were starting in on another session, so I decided I wouldn't even say good-bye. I emptied the contents of my handbag, along with my Belgian Bulldog revolver, into a striped cotton handbag of the sort carried by the Thai women. I got my bod into the *pa sin*, and draped the end over my left shoulder so it hung diagonally across my torso.

I tiptoed out of the apartment.

Five blocks down and three across, Pheng had said. I beat feet that way, trying to stride along in the mincing trot so much adopted by Thai girls.

A sign reading Heavenly Gate, done in red and gold lacquerwork on wood, hung by iron chains over a doorway ornamented like a temple gate. I pushed the door open and walked in. Instantly my nostrils were assailed by the sweetish smell of opium. I grimaced and wriggled my nose.

An oriental opium parlor is something else again. You go into the rooms by way of a long corridor, you push open a leather-covered door and there you are, in a big room lined with wooden benches along the walls, with a couple of cots placed here and there for smokers to sleep out their dreams. Beside these wall-hugging benches were scattered small tables holding a long-stemmed pipe with a tiny bowl, a spirit lamp with matches, a steel needle, a thin strip of bamboo, and a small pill box. All this equipment is needed for the user of opium to "tame the tiger."

There was maybe half a dozen customers on hand,

either sleeping or in the last stages of consciousness. One man was still puffing at his pipe; his eyes were glazed and he was unaware of my presence as I walked past him. The air reeked with the sweetish stink, and I had to put my hand over my mouth to keep my stomach from rebelling.

Opium is derived from the opium poppy, a red and purple flower that also furnishes heroin. Opium smoke tastes a little like caramel, and is very sweet. United Nations statistics say that two million pounds of opium are grown annually in Thailand, Laos, Burma, and in the southwesterly sections of China. This opium is marketed to the west, through such outlet cities as Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore and Rangoon.

My destination was a swinging door on the far side of the room. The Monk did not smoke opium, he was too smart for that, so if he used this den as a hideout, he had to be in a room or an office connected to it.

Through the door, then, and down a little hall. There were doors here—maybe the Monk wasn't the only one who rented space at the Heavenly Gate, I thought—but I could not decide which door was which.

At random, I opened one.

A man and a woman were locked in the love embrace known as the *viparita-bandha* of the Hindus, in which the woman lay on top of the male, her breasts crushed to his chest, her hips working gently, then swiftly, more slowly, and then faster. I figured I was watching an expert in the art, for the woman at whose brown buttocks I found myself staring was regulating the pace like a clock-timer.

“Er—pardon me,” I called out.

The woman turned her head and squealed at me in Thai talk. Her face was—or had been—pretty, but opium had dulled her eyes and much kissing had swollen her lips.

The man was more cooperative. I think he was Italian. Or maybe Spanish. But he spoke English after a fashion, which he managed to do when the female buttocks stopped their jabbing motions.

"Who sent for you, lady?" he got out finally.

"Bikkhu. Bikkhu send."

"Oh—him! Two doors down on the right."

The brown buttocks were wriggling all over again, and the man's words ended in a sob of pleasure. I guess he figured I was a hooker on my way to an assignation. Just so long as I got into that room where the Monk lived, I didn't give a hoot in hell what he thought. I closed the door gently behind me.

Two doors down, on the right. My hand touched the wooden doorknob and twisted. The door opened. A man in the yellow robes of a Buddhist monk looked up from the table where he was standing, his hands holding a Colt revolver and a bullet which he had been about to insert into a chamber of the gun.

My eyes got a fast look at a small cot, a sink and a tiny stove to one side of it, a hanging drape. I did not spare the time for a look-around, I was too concerned with the tall man with the lean, hard face and the blazing golden eyes who stared at me.

He whirled, his gun came up.

I didn't bother taking the Belgian Bulldog out of my cotton handbag. I fired from inside the bag. My bullet caught him in the chest, where its passage made a bright-red stain on the yellow cloth. His eyes got very wide, they bulged as he rocked back on his heels. His left hand, which held the Colt, began to shake.

The weight of the gun must have proved too heavy, for his left arm fell to his side. He teetered a moment, then went backward on his heels. He crashed across a little chair, splintering it as he fell.

I whirled and ran.

We had made enough noise to wake the dead, I figured—what with the booming sounds of my revolver and the splintering chair—and the inhabitants of the Heavenly Gate were by no means dead. Heads popped out of opening doors to gawk at me as I ran for the front door.

I made the street, figuring that I had a few minutes grace. It would take the inhabitants of the Heavenly Gate that long to find out what had happened and to come after me. The sunlight was bright after the dim lights of the opium den. I darted in between the shoppers with their brightly colored *pa sins*, their equally gay shopping bags, bicycles, and even a couple of temple dancers in their jewel-flecked silk brocade costumes, their tiny brown faces pretty under the traditional celestial helmets.

I did not dare to run. I would have been too conspicuous. I walked fast, though, sliding past a street shrine, avoiding the darting rush of a Bangkok taxi.

“Catch her! Catch her!” a voice shrilled.

I looked around with the rest of the passers-by, for the woman wanted by the man in the floppy brown pajama suit standing directly under the Heavenly Gate sign. He was shrilling his words and waving his arms. Now he began to give out with some information.

“She has killed a *bikkhu*—a holy monk!”

A wail of outrage lifted from every throat around me, so I added my voice to the outcry. Slaying a Buddhist monk was about as heinous a crime as you can commit in Gautama country, which stretches all across Japan and China, Tibet, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam.

“Where do you think she went?” I asked a nearby woman who was clutching her shopping bag with both arms as if she were afraid the killer might also prove to be a thief.

"Who knows? Oh, what a terrible thing!"

"Frightful," I agreed, and turned to go.

Naturally, I did not want to linger. I could fool some of the people around me, but I couldn't go on with my pose if the man under the Heavenly Gate sign started coming my way. I started pushing a path between the men and women crowding close around the opium den doorway.

I made it to the corner.

Just as I was rounding the brick building standing there, I ran smack into the Cherub. There were three army men with him, in full uniform. The Cherub and I bumped and bounced back.

He had a good look at my face. I might have fooled him, even so, except for my blue eyes. No Thai girl has blue eyes.

He knew me before he recovered his balance.

CHAPTER FIVE

His face got red and his jaw dropped.

"Grab her," he screamed. "It's the American girl!"

I was ten feet away by the time he found his voice, and I was legging it along as if I were an Olympic runner. I was maybe running even faster; Olympic runners race for medals, while I was fleeing for my life.

I held the skirt of the *pa sin* up to the middle of my things, because my gams needed freedom of movement. I darted through the traffic like an elemental spirit. My heels never touched the pavement, I moved along on my toes.

Babyface was after me with a whoop and a scream of maddened rage. I guess he had had just about enough of me. I heard more feet pounding as the three army

men followed his lead. They did not dare to shoot, the Bangkok streets were too full of shoppers and sightseers to risk that. And believe me, I headed where the congestion was thickest.

It was comparatively easy for me, because all I had to do was keep the old legs moving and shove people out of my path. The Cherub had to keep sight of me while he did the same thing. For a few precious moments while I increased my lead, I hoped I could get away without any more trouble.

No such luck!

Naturally, I was heading away from the Heavenly Gate opium den by this time. I damn well didn't want to get involved in that hassle again. Unfortunately, my way led me into streets where there were hardly any people, just an old couple and a few giggling girls.

I ran like crazy, man!

It just wasn't fast enough. Babyface and his three army buddies rounded the corner, hollering and shouting at the sight of me. I expected a fusillade of bullets to mow me down. The opposition did not disappoint me.

The bullets fusilladed, all right, but they missed me. You can scarcely take aim with a rifle on the dead run, thank goodness.

To my left stood the open doors of a Buddhist temple. The temple façade was covered with gold leaf so that it glittered like a heap of gold in the late afternoon sunlight. I dove for the open doors.

I slammed them shut behind me. There was a metal bar there, so I hauled it out of its rack and slipped it through the slots on either side of the door. Then I turned and raced through the interior of the temple, hunting for the back way out.

The temple was huge, silent except for my footfalls. It was a kind of eerie place with the various statues of the Buddha in all sorts of poses filling up its vast floor

space. There was a reclining statue, about fifty times lifesize, to my right, with a friezework of worshiping monks below his stone form. To my left were smaller statues, of Buddha seated in the traditional cross-legged pose and with his right hand pointing groundward, which is the accepted posture of the Gautama when he called on the earth itself to stand witness to the steadfastness of his vows.

There were other statues behind these main ones, ranging side by side into a dimness where there was little light. I ran for the darkness, because I needed a hiding place, fast.

Behind me, rifle butts were thumping on the gilded wood of the temple doors. I slipped between a white marble statue of a lion, representing a temple guardian, and a silver Buddha about ten feet tall. I leaned my head against the marble flank of the lion and tried to get my breath back.

To my astonishment, I heard the slap of sandals.

A monk in an orange robe was moving toward the barred door. I sighed. The jig was up. I was going to die here in far-off Bangkok, and there wasn't anything anybody could do about it. My hand went into the cotton carryall and lifted out the Belgian Bulldog with the pearl butt-plates that had been my constant companion on all my L.U.S.T. adventures.

I was going to sell my life dearly, godammit!

The monk was arguing with the army men, crying out, "You cannot come in to take a refugee! This is sacred property. There is the law of sanctuary!"

Sanctuary! Yeah, man. I had forgotten about that old doctrine that says a man is safe while on holy grounds. In the medieval era, it had been invoked throughout Europe so that even a king could be balked by this tradition. It had spread to the East, I was happy to see.

My sense of security didn't last long.

The Cherub was saying, his voice muffled by the door, "We come from General Thak Parphon. If you don't open these doors, I'll see to it that this temple is closed down and all its monks thrown into jail as traitors."

The monk wailed, "You cannot do that!"

He knew better. He knew what the Communists had done to the holy monks when they had invaded Tibet in 1965. The youthful Dalai Lama, only fifteen years of age at the time, had to flee overland, guarded by Kham tribesmen, through Karo pass in the Himalayas. When the Red Chinese had come into Tibet, they had looted and tortured the monks in the most diabolical ways.

The monk also understood that General Thak Parphon was friendly to the Communists. He rationalized that if such were the case, the General would not hesitate to close the monastery and give the monks, including himself, to such tortures as had drawn screams of agony from the Tibetan monks.

Shivering, he called weakly, "I will undo the bar."

The bar came down, the Cherub and his three man army came into the temple. He had not bothered to send for reinforcements. I guess he figured that four armed men ought to be able to kill one girl.

Babyface waved his arm. "Spread out. Shoot to kill."

I shrank back into the shadows. I still held my cotton bag in my left hand, but the Belgian Bulldog was in my right. I waited, breathing through my open mouth so as not to make any noise.

A footfall sounded. I crept around the statue of the silver Buddha, gun at the ready. One of the soldiers was coming my way, bending to peer between the statues, his rifle half at rest. I slithered deeper into the shadows.

He came closer. I edged backward so the huge Buddha could hide me. When the faint shadow on the floor told me the soldier had passed, I stepped out.

I swung the Bulldog viciously, catching the soldier across the back of this head. He made no sound, his legs bent under him and he dropped. I leaped to catch him before he could hit the ground, and lowered him gently.

I bound and gagged him.

This soldier was wearing a braided lanyard at his left shoulder; apparently it was a decoration of some sort. It was long, of strong cording. I unfastened it gently.

With the lanyard between my hands and my Belgian revolver in my carryall, I moved forward. In nearby India, the thugs kill gently by the use of a strangling cord not unlike the length of braiding I held in my hands. I figured if they could do it, so could I.

I kicked off my shoes, left them beside the tied-up soldier. On my bare brown feet, I crept forward. The soldiers were making no attempt at keeping quiet, neither was the Cherub. They kept calling out to one another.

One word they repeated a number of times.

“Kilchak! Kilchak! Kilchak!”

It dawned on me finally that this might be the name of the man I had knocked cold. My brilliant deduction was rewarded a few seconds later by Babyface. “Somebody go find Kilchak. If he’s found the girl and is raping her before killing her, I’ll put a bullet in his brain. She’s too dangerous to take chances with.”

A man came patterning between the statues, looking left and right. He looked right when he should have looked left once too often, because I was there, leaping. My arms went around his throat, the braided lanyard dug into his neck, shutting off his breath.

The man bucked half a dozen times, but without air for his lungs he was unable to put up too much of a fight. In moments he was sagging weakly in my hands, then he went completely limp.

I let him down gently, withdrew the cording.

I bent and lifted my revolver out of my handbag. I thought that two to one were odds good enough for Eve Drum, girl secret agent. On bare feet I started on the offense, moving between the statues, pausing quite often to listen. Babyface and his one remaining companion were not as quiet as I, they called to one another and to the two men who could not answer them.

The third soldier took me by surprise, even so. He turned the edge of a Buddha and we found ourselves staring face to face.

A revolver is easier to handle than a rifle, in such close quarters. I raised and fired. The bullet hit him in the belly and the sound of the shot rang in the temple like a thousand *stupa* bells.

“Ukchar?” cried Babyface.

He came running, thinking that Ukchar had done me in. Or maybe he figured Ukchar and the others were taking turns raping me. I never did find out. As he swung past my hiding place, I leaped.

The braiding went about his neck. His hands came up to catch it, to scrabble at it with desperate fingers. He gagged and his faceshield turned purple.

“Too bad, Igor,” I whispered to his ear. “You’re going to die and I’m going to get the tin can with the invasion plans of the Red Chinese. I’ll help place them before the United Nations—and I’ll tell the part that Moscow had to play in the little game.

“Take that into hell with you!”

I tightened the cording.

He died in about three minutes.

I let him drop, went back for my shoes, and ran for the door. The monk in the orange robes stared at me in something like holy awe. I winked and said, “The Gautama whispered to me how to kill the violators of his temple.”

The monk hesitated, then smiled. He bowed low to

me as I ran out into the street. I got the feeling that secretly he was very pleased that the heathens had been defeated by the good guys.

I could slow my pace to a sedate walk now, so I let my thumping heartbeat come back to normal. I was not too far from the business center of Bangkok, along Ya-waraj Road. I decided there might be safety in numbers, so I moved the Drum legs along the sidewalk at a brisk pace.

I had made no plans. I was wandering without purpose, as a matter of fact. David Anderjanian might not have approved of this, but honestly, I was a little beat and I needed time to pull myself together. The General and his army were after me, so was the Bangkok police force. I had nowhere to go except back to Pheng Putar and Neal Harding.

I did not want to put them in any trouble. They had done more than their share in helping me. But I couldn't come up with any other plan.

I turned and angled my steps toward Rajdamnern Avenue.

Moments after I rapped on her door, Pheng Putar asked, "Who is it?"

"Eve, honey. I want in."

She opened the door, eyes big with surprise. "Did you find the Monk? Did you kill him?"

"Yes to both questions," I nodded, slipping inside the apartment. "But now I've got another worry. Suppose the General hires another assassin?"

"In so short a time?" asked Neal Harding from the easy chair where he was savoring the taste of scotch and soda.

I tossed my handbag on a table and plopped down on the sofa. "It isn't very much time, I admit, but I have an idea the General is a very difficult man to foil when he makes up his mind about something."

"You should have waited," he argued.

"No," said Pheng Putar, to my surprise. "She did the right thing. She might never have been able to stop him, otherwise, when he make his try. He was very clever man. With different assassin, he might have chance."

"If there is to be another," I sighed. "In any case, I've got to be there, to make certain. Look, you two—I've been a nuisance and I'm sorry, but this is about the only place—"

"Stay as long as you like," exclaimed Harding genially.

Pheng Putar nodded, her glance thoughtful. "It be best. Nobody know you're here—I hope. I bring back any information I can dig up at Temple of the Curious Caresses."

"I'm going to bed," I murmured, stifling a yawn, "if it's all right with everybody. I'm dragging my tail."

I slept around the clock. When I woke up, the sun was lowering to the west. I smelled cooking odors. I turned over on my back and stretched, feeling warm and comfy.

Seconds later, Neal Harding knocked on the door.

"Hey, you up yet?" he called.

"Not yet. Come on in."

The door opened. He stuck his head through the opening and grinned at sight of my tousled brown hair and my blue eyes showing in a very brown face.

I tossed back the covers before I remembered I was wearing a thin pink nylon nightie Pheng Putar had loaned me. Neal Harding blinked and nodded, seeing my bod as good as naked under it.

"Blimey, pet—you're dynamite."

I grinned at him, shaking my head. "I never intrude on a friend's property, Neal. You belong to Pheng Putar."

He retorted, "She's worn me out, anyhow. Still, I'll clear out like a gentleman and let you get dressed."

I slipped into my *pa sin* and white cotton chemise. When I was modest, I went out into the kitchen and let Neal serve me liver and bacon, with toast.

"If you were going to kill the Prince, where would you do it, Neal?" I asked between bites. "You know Bangkok better than I do."

"Near the reviewing stand, ducks. Just as the car is braking to a stop to let the Prince and the General go up into the stands to review the army units."

"Yeah, maybe," I murmured.

I was remembering the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. A rifleman some distance away had fired the fatal shot. A rifleman might very well stand in window of a nearby building and pump lead into the Prince, in which case I would have no way of stopping him.

When I mentioned my worry to the big Englishman he shook his head. Waving a piece of toast at me, he argued, "Oh, no. If the General had an expert marksman under his wing, he would never have hired the Monk. No, a rifleman is out. The Monk's favorite weapon was a revolver with a silencer, with which he was very, very good. There's one more thing you must consider.

"The General will be riding alongside the Prince."

"Now Thak Parphon loves life, very much. He isn't going to risk it by playing sitting duck for a rifleman who may miss the Prince and get him. No, no, pet."

We sat thinking, my chin on my fist and elbow on the table, Neal Harding with his sun-brown face set in craggy lines, scowling in thought. He chuckled, after a moment.

"You know, I don't think he'll use a gunman at all. I think he'll hire a man to stick a dagger in the Prince."

"A dagger? But surely the police will catch a man like that?"

"Oh, ducks—there are a thousand men in Bangkok who'd kill their own mothers for some money. The General knows this, he can always reach out and tap one. He has to make sure the man won't talk, however."

"A deaf mute?" I wondered.

The big adventurer nodded. "I'd say so. And by the time they can torture him to make him write down what he knows—always assuming he can write—the General can slip a little poison into his food."

"I'm relieved to hear that," I smiled.

"Don't be. There are some excellent knife men in Bangkok, men who've used a dagger to make a living in the side streets and alleyways all their lives. A knife is quick, silent. A good man could inch close to the open touring car in which the Prince will be riding, stab him in the crowd before he is even noticed.

"Everybody will be so excited, nobody will remember to lay hands on him. This is what you have to worry about."

This guy was as bad as David Anderjanian when it came to discouraging a girl. I said, "This means I've got to stand real close to the touring car—risking discovery by the General—all the time I'm waiting for the murder attempt."

Harding nodded affably, "Just about."

His eyes were slightly narrowed as he raked me with them. This was not the look of lust for a woman; it was a calculated judging of my ability as a secret agent. Neal Harding was enjoying himself, he was caught up in something that roused his interest.

In a sense, I suppose, it was like a big-game hunt. The assassin was the big game, I was the hunter. If the assassin killed his man, I would have failed in my as-

signment. Maybe it was exciting—for him. To me, it was just another dirty job to do.

I said, "All right. I accept your challenge."

His eyebrows arched. "My challenge, ducks?"

I leaned across the table, smiling tightly. "While I've been out beating feet over half of Bangkok, you've been leaning back thinking about my job—when you haven't been screwing the behind off Pheng Putar. You're a big-game hunter, you're used to stalking animals. You think the way an assassin thinks. I'll buy that. You have wondered, if you were the assassin, how you might kill the Prince."

His grin was infectious. "Right you are, pet. I've worked out a scheme, too. Remember, this new killer doesn't have the time to work out details that the Monk had. He has to go in blind, so to speak. I think he'll make his attack where the crowd will be greatest, just before the Prince steps from the car to go up on the reviewing stand."

"You just want to see how I handle myself in a fix," I snapped at him. "I wonder why?"

His eyelids blinked; I had scored a shot.

But *why* did he want to see me in action?

"I don't suppose you'd tell me?" I threw at him.

"Not now. Later."

"This means you'll be around when the murder attempt is made, if there is any?"

"Maybe," he answered laconically.

It was all I could get out of him.

We spent the next two days eating and sleeping. My nights were disturbed a little by the love-making that went on when Pheng Putar came home, but I pulled the blanket up over my ears and shut out most of the sounds.

Pheng Putar was a mine of information, incidentally.

"They've bundled your things at the temple, for ship-

ment back to the states. Dolo is positive you're dead. I offered to mail them for her, but she's going to do it herself."

Great! This meant the only clothes I owned was the evening gown hanging up in Pheng Putar's closet. I had my wallet filled with *bahts* and American traveler's checks together with my Belgian revolver, but that was it. I realized I would need more than that if I ever got away from Bangkok to go hunting for the Laotian temple where the Red Chinese invasion plans were hidden. But I'd cross that bridge when I came to it.

"Dolo says the General is ranting and raving because you killed Igor Stamskovich and three of his men," Pheng Putar added. "You must be quite a girl when you go into action. The General has men out looking for you, all over town."

"She's safe here," commented Neal.

When the morning of the possible assassination dawned, I was up early. I ate a good breakfast and did myself up in the *pa sin*. I had touched up my skin and re-tinted my hair so that I was the native girl once more.

With my carryall in hand, I slipped unseen from the apartment building and made tracks toward Petchaburi Road, where the reviewing stands had been built. I was soon in a crowd of peasants from the outlying farms and pretty dancing girls taking a holiday from doing the *lakon* with their brightly painted parasols catching the rays of the midday sun. The *farangs*, as the Thai people name the foreigners, were everywhere.

Nobody paid any attention to me. It was holiday time and everyone was too interested in getting to see the parade to bother about a nondescript girl, which I was to all appearances. I rubbed elbows with a few workers from the Datsun plant, and also with lean, leathery

wood carvers. I saw a few priests in orange or yellow robes carrying oddly shaped umbrellas.

Wriggling and squirming between men and women, I made my way to a place not far from the reviewing stand. I looked around me at the nearby faces, hoping I might be able to pick out the possible killer from his features. No such luck. Everybody looked contented and happy.

I waited an hour and a half before an open touring car bearing General Thak Parphon and the Prince slid into view. I wasted no glances on the Prince, I was all eyes for the General.

He kept glancing at his wristwatch.

I figured the time to strike was near; if there was to be an attempt to kill the Prince it would happen very soon. I slipped my hand into my carryall and wrapped fingers about the butt of the Bulldog. Meanwhile, my eyes roved over those Thailanders nearest to me, keeping tabs on all of them.

I had reasoned that as the car neared the reviewing stand, the General would want to make sure the assassin was at hand. His eyes would be studying the crowd. When he saw the would-be killer, he might blink or nod his head.

I was not even sure there would be an assassination attempt. I was here on the off chance that the General had hired another killer. As the car began to stop, I forgot everything else and concentrated on Thak Parphon.

Suddenly, he gave a little nod.

I followed the direction of his eyes. A small man in a shortsleeved shirt and blue denims—a lot of the Thai people adopt western clothes—was waving his arms and pushing forward. He was only about five feet away.

On the surface, the man was just eager to get near his ruler; to see him closer up. I felt I knew better. I did

some shoving on my own, kicked a shin or two, and started yelling exuberantly.

The man in the blue denims was less than three yards from the car when he made his move. I saw his hand dart inside his shirt and come out with a glittering Hindu *khuttar*, a dagger that is as deadly as it looks. He kept his hand close to his body but I got a good look at the long blade, probably because I was half-expecting it.

He slid between two girls, and now he was a yard away from the car. With an unearthly scream, he lunged, blade high for the downward stroke that would plunge it into the Prince's heart.

My Belgian Bulldog came out of the carryall.

I stepped forward, whipping up the gun.

The Prince had turned, he saw the dagger close to his chest. The General was leaning backward to be out of the line of stabbing; later, he could insist he was recoiling in horror. The Prince cried out in alarm.

My finger pressed the trigger.

The bullet caught the dagger-man right in the middle of his back. His forward motion carried him against the car but his arm, descending with the dagger, swerved off course as death touched him. His body sagged down against the car, falling to its knees.

General Thak Parphon did not know what had happened. So loud had been the screech of the assassin that it had damned near drowned out the sound of the Bulldog's firing. Nobody else seemed to know what had happened, either.

I cried, "Somebody's killing the Prince!"

At the same time, I surged backwards, clawing at the men and women crowding in around me. My revolver was back in its carryall, I was no more than a terrified Thai girl trying to get to safety.

I had counted on the fact that people close to a trag-

edy or near-tragedy press forward to get nearer to it out of human curiosity. I slipped and wriggled a path between bodies until I was on the outskirts of the crowd.

Not daring to run for fear of attracting attention, I sauntered past a couple of building walls as I sought for an intersecting street down which to vanish. Nobody needed me. The air was filled with shouts and screams as everybody within hearing distance wanted to know what was happening.

A band struck up, not far away.

I stepped into a recessed doorway and got my breath back. I was in what might be called the Chinese section of the city. There are more than half a million Chinese in Bangkok, and their ships can be seen here and there in the business quarter. I stared at a curio shop to my left where such musical instruments as the yung-kum, the pi-pa and the jong were on sale. There was a rare Sinkiang prayer wheel, which said a thousand prayers at a single turn, and a dozen forms of Buddha in small, large and very large statuettes.

To my right was a drugstore with Indian rhino horn, a great aphrodisiac, offered for true, if aging, lovers, seal kidneys for male potency, ground pearl dust that helped against coughs, gorilla blood for female ailments, and even ground umbilical cord for general good health. I wished I had some of that dried umbilical cord, I can tell you that; my heart felt as if it might give out at any second.

After I got my breath back and my heart stopped thudding so crazily, I slipped from the little recess between stores and walked casually but swiftly down the street. My carryall swung to my strides, I felt more at peace with the world.

Poor little me! I walked in a fool's paradise.

When I came to the end of the block, three young

toughs stepped out into the sidewalk, barring my path. They wore tight black denims and pullover black sweaters with turtlenecks. Broad leather belts gripped their slim middles.

Each of them held a knife.

CHAPTER SIX

I figured at first they were out to rob me.

No such luck.

They came forward with a slow, stalking movement that told me they meant business. They did not ask for money; they held the knives low so that when the opportunity came they could plunge the blades into my flesh. Side by side, herded me back until my spine was pressed against the display window of a silk shop.

I feinted toward the man on the end, then swung around and lashed out with my right foot at a second man's knife-hand. He was so surprised that he actually dropped the blade, his face twisted up in pain, as my foot connected with his forearm.

Out of the corners of my eyes I saw the other two bully boys lunge for me. I did not wait to greet them; I bent my body and did a forward somersault, my right hand going for the fallen knife. When I came up on my feet, the blade was glittering in my hand.

I am a wearer of the red and white belt in Judo, a member of the Sixth Dan. Long before I became a L.U.S.T. agent I had won this decoration by long devotion to the judo classes conducted by a Japanese gentleman named Mifune Oksobiro. I was no ordinary opponent, believe me.

My hand with the knife was driving upward into the belly of the young man doubled over in pain. At the

same time I grabbed the black sweater he wore and swung him into the path of his companions. My blade ripped into flesh and blood as his dying body thudded into those of his buddies.

I shoved the carcass forward, and leaped to slash at the second man. I missed his face, but not by much. I could actually see his yellow skin go gray when he realized how close he had come to some of his own medicine.

In fencing, there is an attack called *incartata* by the Italian school. In the *incartata*, the fencer drops to a knee and an outstretched leg while his sword darts in beneath the guard of his opponent. Instead of a sword, I carried a seven-inch blade. I dropped, my knee scraped the pavement and my blade buried itself in the black sweater and muscular torso of my second victim.

With a scream of pure hate, the third man hurled himself through the air. I rolled over onto my back, I got a leg up in the *tomoe nage*, the stomach throw, and buried my slippered foot in his midsection.

The air went out of his lungs.

His body went sailing upside-down. I slithered around and dove, my bloody knife out in front of me. He tried to roll aside. I was aiming for his chest, but his whipping turn threw me off target. My steel went into his throat.

Blood flew upward like steam from a Yellowstone geyser.

I rolled back and out of the way, I hurled the knife from me and lifting the long skirt of my *pa sin*, started to run. I got as far as the corner before I saw the black car and the burly man coming from the shadow it formed on the road.

I tried to dart past him, but he was quick despite his bulk. His long arms opened up and wrapped about me, lifting me off the ground.

"Do not kill her!" cried a female voice.

The gorilla like man grunted as I kicked his shins. He held both my arms to my sides, so I couldn't go for his face. I writhed and cursed and tried to bite, but he had too good a grip on me.

He carried me toward the car.

The door swung outward. There was a woman seated inside the car, wearing nylon stockings, a mini-skirt and a frilly blouse. She had a small automatic in her hand—a 1910 Mauser, I think it was—but her face was half-hidden in the darkness of the car's interior.

I tried to turn my neck to see her face. It was then that the gorilla-man lowered me and slammed my head into the edge of the door. I didn't know another thing.

I opened my baby blues to the smell of stinking hides and the feel of hot sunlight on my face. I was lying on my back, tied and bound and gagged under an animal skin. There were voices all around me. I made out enough words, here and there, to understand that I was in a kind of marketplace.

A voice said, "All right, swing it up."

Hands folded the hides around me. I started to wriggle, trying to fight my captor. He chuckled thickly, saying, "She's alive."

A woman said, "Good—but keep your voice down."

I landed on the wooden floorboards of what appeared to be a cart of some sort. Something was tossed over me, and then something else. Hides! The stinking, hot hides of dead animals. I moaned, I kicked my legs, but the hides were too heavy for my movements to be seen by any passers-by.

The sweat was running down my back by this time and forming beads on my forehead. It was damn hot under the heavy hides, and the smell was enough to drive a girl crazy. I could only lie there and suffer.

It got worse, believe it or not.

The cart started to move.

I heard the creak of sun-dried wood as axles and hubs began to turn and iron-banded wheels began thumping along a cobblestoned street. My body was bumped and thumped and bounced without mercy on the hard wooden planks of the cart floor. The hides were a kind of soft hammer socking it to me at every turn of the wheels.

I damn near died.

I did pass out for a little while half-smothered. I have no idea how long I lay like that. All I know is that when I woke up, I was weeping quiet tears and wishing I were dead.

There was a cool breeze laden with fragrance filtering through my nostrils and across my flushed, wet face. I opened my eyes to a grinning face above me.

"Is good, you live," the face said.

"Take the hides off her," a woman ordered.

The stinking weights came off but I couldn't move a muscle. I just lay there, sagging. Hands touched my arms, dragged me upward until I was sitting on the Drum behind and leaning against a supporting shoulder. My dazed eyes went around a rain forest clearing, seeing men in black pajamas with bandoliers of cartridges slung over their shoulders, carrying automatic assault rifles. They wore shapeless khaki hats on their heads. They were all looking at me without any emotion in their eyes. Waiting.

The woman seemed to blur at first as a wave of dizziness washed over me and I swayed. Hands caught my shoulders, steadied me. She was smiling coldly, studying me, slapping a Mauser automatic barrel into her cupped palm. Her long black hair hung down over a khaki blouse that showed somewhat heavy breasts pushing boldly outward. The blouse was tucked into brown cor-

duroy jodhpurs that revealed curving hips and shapely legs.

I knew this woman.

And yet—

I could not put a name to her.

She came strolling toward me, black eyes blazing. There was hate in her lovely features and a cold cruelty in her slitted eyes. She paused within a yard of me, leaning against the side of the cart.

“Filthy capitalistic bitch!”

I blinked. I knew her voice, too. Who the hell was this dame? I tried to think, but my mind felt as gooey as the rest of me. Her hand dropped.

“We’ll make you talk,” she nodded.

Then she appeared to forget me, turning away on a booted heel and walking forward. The man whose shoulder kept me upright pushed me sideways so the side of the cart could act as a prop.

A whip cracked. The cart began trundling forward, making me sway. I was riding in comparative luxury because, although I could still smell the hides, they were not pressing down on me. Their smell was eased by the fragrance of the jungle flowers past which we moved.

I swung and swayed to the rhythm of the cart.

I tried to remember who the woman was, and could not. After a time I simply let go of everything and fell asleep. It was night when a hand shook my shoulder.

“Is crazy,” said a man. “She sleep.”

So I was sleeping when I should have been worrying. Big deal. I learned a long time ago on my L.U.S.T. assignments that if a girl could not sleep, she might as well give up the job and go home to mother. I blinked the puffiness out of my eyelids and looked around me.

They had a fire going, and already food was cooking. Half a dozen of the little men in black pajamas were

erecting a tent. Some others were digging a hole in the ground close by the tent. I got the uncanny feeling that the tent was for the lady in the corduroy jodhpurs while the hole might be for me.

I shivered. A hand caught my arm, started to lift, but I was so weak from my cramped position that it only hurt, and my body slid sideways into the hides.

“Idiot!” said the woman, coming up from the shadows. “I don’t want her hurt. At least, not yet. Be gentle. Ease her out, hold her. Let her walk around.”

She came closer when my feet touched the hard-packed dirt of the little clearing as I stood upright. She smiled faintly, lifting her fingers to the gag at my mouth. She wedged her fingernails under the wide strip of adhesive and gave a little yank. Slowly, taking infinite pains, she peeled it free.

“There we are. Now, feel a little better?”

I nodded. I said with numb lips, even as a man knelt to untie the ropes at my ankles, “Yes, thank you. I know you, don’t I? I’ve seen you before, somewhere. I just can’t place you—and I have a memory for faces.”

Her black eyes were gleeful. “You know me. It’ll come to you. Right at this minute, I want to ask you a few questions. Come along.”

Two stools had been set up in front of the tent. My captor sank onto one, gestured me to bump rump on the other. My hands were still tied behind my back, and this position shoved my breasts out a little too boldly, I guess, because her eyes studied their shapeliness for long moments.

“You are a spy for the United States,” she said dreamily, still watching where my nipples made little bumps in the thin chemise-blouse I wore with my rather rumpled *pa sin*.

“You said it, I didn’t,” was my brilliant reply.

She laughed and waved a hand. “Please, no fencing. I

know your name. Eve Drum. I know also that you killed the Monk, that you also killed Igor Stramskovich and three army men in a fight in a Buddhist temple. You also saved the life of the Prince, yesterday."

Yesterday? I had been knocked about under those hides longer than I thought. No wonder I was so stiff, so cramped.

"So then, we need have no secrets from one another. Agreed?" She ignored my shake of the head to add, "I will ask you once. If you do not tell me what I want to know, you shall be punished."

I shrugged. Inside, I was all quivery jelly, because I know the tortures one woman can think up for another woman. I put on my brave face and asked, "Do you mind if I have something to eat? Honestly, I'm starved."

Her eyes went wide, her red mouth opened. "But of course! What sort of hostess am I?" She leaned forward and with a hand, patted my thigh. Gently, caressingly, like a lover. Her black eyes glowed like red coals. "I want you to be happy with me, Eve."

Yeah, man! Like wild.

She purred, "Would you like a bath?"

I actually moaned. "Would I ever!"

"You shall have it. Kam! My Tay!"

Two of the little men trotted toward her. In seconds they were filling metal pots with water from a nearby stream and carrying them into the tent. A collapsible leather tub had been set up; into this they splashed the water. Apparently this Pathet Lao dragon lady liked to live in style during her jungle journeys.

She herself tied the tent flaps, turning her face to smile over a shoulder at me. "We are alone. Go ahead, take off your clothes."

Her hands went from the tie-thongs to her blouse buttons. As I gawked she began undoing them. One by

one the buttons came free of their holes until her blouse hung open and I could see the inner swells of large brown breasts. Above them, her black eyes mocked me.

"Well? Shall we not bathe? Undress, Eve."

My memory cells were stirring to life. There was something about this dame that bugged me, but I couldn't remember what it was. My own fingers began to move, throwing off the over-the-shoulder part of my *pa sin*, putting fingers to the hem of the cotton chemise blouse and lifting it.

My pale breasts bounced into view and shook a little, big and full. The reddish brown nipples stiffened outward as the night air touched them. An oil lamp had been hung from a cross-piece; by its light, the woman studied my mammary attractions with an avid stare.

She shook her shoulders slightly. The blouse parted a little more. As if to see for herself how nice my breasts were, she started walking toward me. Her own breasts jounced up and down, scratching nipples against the stuff of her open shirt. When she was almost breathing in my face, she paused and put her hands under my breasts, lifting my mammarys, shaking them gently.

Her touch was exquisite. She might be an enemy, but she knew her way around a female torso. She ran gentle fingertips up over my hardening nipples, brushing them back and forth while smiling her secret thoughts. Her full red mouth, heavily lipsticked, was curved like an overripe fruit.

"You're a darling," she whispered.

Her head went down, her lips went out to kiss my nipples. I jerked, unable to control my bodily reactions. Deep into her wet mouth she drew my breast tip, like a baby nursing. Her fingernails went up and down my bare sides above the waistband of the torn *pa sin* skirt. Then she marched them to the curving undersides of my rocklike breasts.

"No," I whispered. "I stink."

It was the first thing I could think of to get her to stop. She was getting to me, my poor body needed a little consolation right now and this she-devil knew it. And she also knew how to give it to me. She came away from my nipple, leaving a red Moval of lipstick about it, and nodded her head.

"Yes, that's best. First, the bath."

She put her hands behind her and catching one sleeve-cuff, began to tug on it. This thrust out her breasts and drew the blouse flaps away from them. I saw them shaking up and down, watched as the blouse slid away like a stage curtain opening until the big brown mounds and purple nipples were stark naked before me.

Psychologists explain the fascination of men and some women for the female breast as a searching for the mother-image and those safe, protected days of babyhood. The psycho books call this particular devotion partialism, and more specifically, mammaeism. It is pathological in nature when the libido becomes fixed only on the breast. Some men prefer their sexual activities to deal only with the female breast, either in *coitus inter mammas* or when actually sucking on the female bosom. This partialism is blood brother to fetishism and transvestism.

The female who kisses and suckles another female's breasts is often betraying symptoms of a mother fixation. The beloved takes the place of the mother, she herself is the child once more. What she does to the mother-image, she wants done to her in return. It is a form of seeking love and affection—which we all need, God knows.

I was not thinking of explanations at the moment, I must admit. Maybe it was that awful ride under the stinking hides or the idea that my body was not to be tortured for a while and that I'd better do what I could

do to win over this woman and maybe stay alive, but I told myself to play along.

I can go irregular at times. My psyche is geared that way, it is partially the reason why they name me Oh Oh Sex at L.U.S.T. headquarters. It is also the reason why I am still alive and well in some corner of the earth, carrying on my L.U.S.T. duties. Better a live lez than a dead spy, I have told David Anderjanian.

"Oh!" I gasped as her breasts jiggled and shook with overripe fleshiness. "Let me."

My palms went under her breasts, lifting and gently shaking them. I leaned to let my tongue come up out and across those mounds of hardening flesh. The woman whimpered, quivering. My lips sought her nipples, drew on them.

"Yes—ohh, yes!" she hissed, eyes half-closed.

I ran my hot little palms up her bare back, then down to the belt that held up her jodhpurs. Around in front, just above her navel, I found the buckle of her belt. I undid it, still nursing on first one jutting breast and then the other, and ran my hands inside her loosening jodhpurs.

Soft female hips under my palms. The first swell of plump buttocks. The backs of my hands were carrying her nylon underpants downward along with the corduroy riding breeches, baring her hips. Her pubic thatch was neatly trimmed, looking like crisp black wire where her mons Veneris bulged.

I knelt to draw off her boots, making certain that she could see how adoring were my eyes as I studied her nakedness above me. The blouse still hung from her smooth brown shoulders but only barely; it seemed more erotic, somehow, with that shirt still on her.

Then the boots were off, and the riding breeches with her white underpants. She herself shook loose of the khaki shirt, letting it pool on the bare dirt floor.

Then I knew her.

"Lumm!" I cried.

Lumm, the lesbian lovely in the Temple of the Curious Caresses, who had been playing with her breasts under my eyes as Dolo Hawkins opened her door. Lumm, who had lashed the Cherub so eagerly on stage, revealing her hatred of men.

She gurgled laughter at me, staring down between slitted eyes. "You didn't know me with clothes on," she accused, and bent almost double in her mirth. I guess it was pretty funny in her eyes. I added my own yacks to hers.

While she wiped away the laughter tears from her cheeks, she said, "I am the Lady Lumm in these jungles. I have the rank of colonel among the Pathet Lao I command in the north."

"I'd never have believed it," I told her.

She glanced at me sharply, then smiled. "Well, it's so. I was in the temple because it's another role I play at times, when General Thak Parphon wants to learn things. You'd be surprised how much idle gossip the girls learn from the important visitors that the General brings to the temple."

Her shoulders lifted and fell. "People do not know what they reveal when they talk. Little things that agents like myself have been caught to interpret. You're a secret agent—you know."

If she was trying to pump me, she failed miserably. She *said* I had killed the Monk, Igor Stamskovich and the three army men. She had no proof. I wasn't even sure she could prove I was the girl who had saved the Prince from an assassin. All she knew for sure, I reassured myself, was the fact that I had judoed a win over her bullyboys in a Bangkok alleyway.

"I don't know what you mean, secret agent," I smiled.

Anger flared in her black eyes. She was a volatile one, this wench. I could strike sparks from her quite easily. I decided I'd better not try for too many; after all, I was her prisoner.

Her hand darted to my long brown tresses, that are normally bright gold. She whispered, "Did you see that hole my men were digging outside? It's to put a stake in. The stake is for you, Eve Drum—unless you cooperate." Her mouth twisted into a grim smile. "Our side can always use a girl like you. You will be given a chance to think it over. You have never seen anybody burned at the stake, have you? In the fashion of your North American Indians? Or like Joan of Arc? I have. It is not a pretty sight. For the female being burned, it is very painful."

"I'll bet," I murmured.

"Now, then. We have settled that between us. On with the bath—and while we're at that, let's get that brown goo off you, you look much better in your pale pink hide."

I got up and was about to slide down my *pa sin*, but her hands were there before me, unwinding the striped silk and shucking it off my body. I came naked into the lamplight; Lumm ate her eyeballs full of my shapely nudity. Her hand came out to verify the truth of what she was seeing.

She stroked my belly, brushing her hands across my fluffy femininity. She caressed my buttocks and creamy back. I stood and let her have her kicks. What else was I going to do? I was not about to volunteer for that stake.

I got into the tub. She came with me. Her hands reached for the cloth and soap and when she had a spill of lather worked up, she used the washrag on me. My tanned skin came into view after a few minutes. When she was done, she was sweating, what with the warm

water and her exertions and my unclad body against which she moved her breasts and thighs and loins from time to time.

“Now you,” I told her.

She shook her head. “No. I do myself. However, I guess you can wash my back.”

I washed her back and her soft brown behind. She liked it so much she turned around with a little sigh and lifting her arms, gave me the rest of her to clean. I took my time, using little tricks I knew.

The erogenous zones on a female body are many and varied—far more so than those of the male, whose only true erogenous zone is his genitals. The breasts, the hips, the buttocks, even the throat and ears of a woman are responsive to erotic stimulation. The nape of the neck, the soles of the feet, the navel area, even the palms of female hands have been known to make a woman respond orgasmically to sensual caresses. Every individual is different, of course; what some may consider to be the height of erotic strokings can be shrugged off by another.

There are four phases in female erotic pleasure. The excitement phase is first, during which her erogenous zones—or some of them, at least—are stimulated so that her body enters a period of sensual stimulation. Her breasts and nipples may be caressed, a palm may fondle her hips or buttocks. Even kisses on the neck can work her up.

She is now ready for the second stage, the plateau phase. Her blood rate increases, a flush takes place over much of her body, she breathes heavier and faster. Muscles contract. The breasts and nipples swell, her Bartholin glands are excreting their fluids, the clitoris rises.

After this plateau phase, the woman slips into the third stage, that of the orgasm itself. Her organs and

blood vessels become swollen, her vaginal muscles spasm, followed by a series of rhythmic and intense muscular contractions in the vagina itself. Her breathing rate, pulse beat and blood pressure build up to peaks. The face muscles jerk, often pulling the face into a caricature of its normal self. The muscles of the neck, arms and legs go into spasms.

Then as the orgasmic pleasure fades, and the recovery begins, the woman loses her body flush, her heart beat slows, her pressure lowers. The breasts and nipples lose their swelling, and quite often a woman begins to sweat over most of her body. Occasionally this recovery phase takes as much as half an hour.

When I was done, Lumm had touched every phase.

She was a sobbing mass of wriggling womanhood when I finished, she was damn near dying with the heat bubbling in her veins. She caught me, slithered her wet body to mine and her open mouth came down to feast upon my lips. I put my arms around her and kissed like I meant it. It was better than getting burned at the stake.

After a while I whispered, "Let me dry you off."

We did the towel bit with each other, with Lumm kissing whatever part of my body she could reach with her mouth while her hands rubbed my flesh with the towel. I half-expected her to stretch me out on the cot to one side of the tent and go after me, but she still had some sort of control over herself.

"We'll eat together, and talk," she told me. "Later we can come back here and be alone."

She furnished me with a silk dressing gown. I wrapped myself up in it, vaguely conscious of the fact that it clung to my feminine shape with revealing honesty. Lumm put on its mate, with the same results.

We moved out of the tent toward two stools. To my surprise, the jungle clearing was almost empty. There

was the fire near which the stools had been placed, and overhead the moon hung in a soft blue sky, with the leafy branches of the tree ferns and the tapang trees forming a tracery that might have been shaped by the delicate fingers of Irish lacemakers.

Two men stood guard, some distance away.

“Where is everybody?” I wondered.

“The men have another camp,” she informed me.

Then it dawned on me. Lumm was an out-and-out lady-lover. She hated men. Her hang-up carried over even to their night stops, I gathered. Something else occurred to me. Lumm must be reveling in my presence. I was an attractive broad, a commodity the jungles of Thailand could not furnish. She might be willing to keep me alive and by her side if I played my cards right.

At her hand clap, a Pathet Lao guerrilla came running, carrying a small collapsible table. He set it up, and put plates and cups, knives and forks on it. Two more of the little men in the black pajamas came scurrying, scooping out a savory stew and placing homemade biscuits on our plates. A third man filled our cups with rice wine.

“This is *gang pat*,” murmured Lumm, beginning to eat.

“It’s delicious,” I nodded, shoveling forkfuls of the dish into my mouth. “It’s sweet and there’s fish in it.”

“The sweet taste is due to the coconut milk that forms a base. We’re using fish because we can get fish from the jungle pools. City cooks in Bangkok use pork, chicken or beef.”

I washed the meal down with the wine.

We were not done yet. A man brought a wooden bowl of mangoes that Lumm cut into juicy slices and handed to me. I had never eaten mango before. I found it absolutely out of this world.

“You dine well,” I offered, wiping my hands on a

small napkin. "I'm surprised you carry this much food with you."

"Oh, we don't carry it. The villagers give it to us."

I thought about the Thai custom of the Buddhist priests who visited the homes of people for gifts of food. I wondered out loud if there were any religious significance to the gifts.

"Self-preservation," laughed Lumm. "If they don't give us food, we shoot them. They want to stay alive, we want to eat. Sometimes they are very generous."

I felt a little sick at the idea but I kept my mouth shut. My body was very pleased with the *gang pat* and the mango slices. To cover up any expression of distaste I might have shown her, I patted my tummy.

"A terrific method," I commented. "You don't have to bother about food at all on the trail. What about water?"

"We carry it in canteens. It's yellowish, because we boil it with a few tea leaves thrown in to drown out the impurities. So in case you think it's muddy, it isn't."

She clapped again. More men came running to take away the plates and cups and little table. This left Lumm and me on our own. I had already seen out of the corners of my eyes that the stake was in place. All it lacked was me. I told myself it would go on without me for as long as I could keep it that way.

Lumm crossed her legs, her wrapper falling back to show me a shapely brown leg from rounded hip to ankle. "Now then, let's talk."

I nodded, putting my knees together and clasping them in my hands. "All right. I'll talk. What do you want to know?"

"Are you a secret agent?" she asked.

"No," I lied.

She frowned. "I could tie you to that stake, you

know. You'd talk if we piled up some twigs around your pretty feet and set fire to them."

"Sure I would," I admitted honestly. "But I'd be lying, just telling you what you wanted to hear."

This was the fault of torture. A man or woman said what the torturer wanted to hear, and to hell with anything like the truth under pain. Lumm knew it. She sighed and smiled at me.

"You were with the General all night after you and he left the Temple of the Curious Caresses," she accused.

"Yes, I was. Is that a crime?"

"No. But the General came storming into the temple next morning screaming that you were some kind of capitalistic slut who was going to put a spike in his wheel. What he meant was, he had blabbed his fat mouth off to you."

"He told me the Prince was going to be killed, yes."

"And you shot the Monk, who was the paid assassin!"

"I did no such thing," I exclaimed indignantly. "I got up early, the General was still asleep, I didn't want to wake him and I went for a walk."

"Where?"

"Don't ask me. I'm a stranger in Bangkok."

"It's awfully odd that somebody shot and killed the Monk that very morning. It's almost as if you did it."

"How would I ever find the Monk, whoever he is?"

It was a facer, since she did not know about Pheng Putar or Neal Harding. For all she knew, I was so bushed by all the belly bumping I had done with the General that I had simply holed up in a hotel somewhere. The army and the police had missed me when they searched the city. It was that simple.

Lumm shook her head. She raised the hem of her robe and pretended to rearrange it, giving me a good

look at her soft brown belly. Her eyes stared at me boldly, making sure I was watching.

She murmured, "It could be the way way you say. You could have gone for a walk. It doesn't seem possible, however. The Buddhist monk in that temple delighted in telling us how a simple native girl had killed the Russian and three army men. By the way, why were you tinted and hair-dyed to look like a native girl?"

I said, "I was made up to look like a native girl because I heard a conversation from some passers-by while I was walking on the street that the General was sending men out to kill a blonde American girl. I thought it might be safer."

As she said, she had no way to prove I was guilty. I denied all her accusations and insinuations. She was working on suspicion alone.

Her eyes told me she was not quite willing to kill me without reason. Her lust for my body warred with her loyalty to the Pathet Lao cause. She smiled suddenly, and I knew lust had won for the night.

Lady Lumm got to her feet but did not bother to pull the wrapper together. Under it, she was naked, and all woman. Well, I was all woman myself. And since my life was at stake, I figured I'd better give back what she gave.

I let my thighs widen as I made a slow lunge to get to my feet. My thighs opened and then shut but she had seen what her eyes hunted. Her laughter made a lewd sound in the air. She held out her hand to me.

"Come, enough of politics and dead men. Life is for the living and we're both alive right now."

As she tugged me upward, she opened her wrapper and moved her body so that it pressed against mine. Her breasts were hard, their nipples stiff, her flesh was hot. Her black eyes burned into mine.

Her red mouth was very close. It opened as she

leaned to kiss me. I gave her back her kiss, sliding an arm about her neck. Our tongues met, teased. Her hand went into my wrapper, stroked up and down my back and patted my buttocks.

"To bed," she breathed.

But not to sleep. Ah, no. The blankets that were spread on the hard-packed dirt floor would be for our bodies as they turned and slithered together, while we kissed and caressed. They would be wet with love sweat in the morning. And we would sleep the sleep of the sensually exhausted.

I told myself I had to be awake, come dawn.

It might be my own only chance for escape, because the Pathet Lao would be sleeping soundly, so would Lady Lumm. I set myself to accomplish this feat as I entered the tent with her.

"Let me," I breathed into her soft throat as I kissed it, "let me be your love slave. Let me wait on you. Pretend you are the queen and I the captive, sent here to pleasure your flesh."

She moaned as my palms went around her naked hips, stroking them, scratching them lightly with my long fingernails. I sought out her buttock crease, the fluffy mons Veneris. She quivered and moaned. I let my hands slide up her front until I was behind her and her breasts shook lazily to my caressing palms.

I kissed her shoulder and let the wrapper slide down. I pressed against her naked back, stroking her with my entire body.

"I can't wait," she gasped, hips working. "Please!"

"You shall never forget this night," I promised, "but we must do things my way. I have made a study of love. I have read the forbidden books of Elephantis and studied the sonnets of Sappho, which tell of her love for Irinna and Atthis. Some of her poems are most explicit, they taught and tantalized at the same time. The Roman

writer Lucian, in his Dialogues, is most specific when he describes the conduct of Demonassa and Megilla."

I used Sappho as a guide, I seemed to hear the voice of that famous Lesbian whispering in my ears. I bent and turned and knelt as I crooned and lavished the caress of fingernails and hands and lips and mouth upon the body of this lush Thai woman. I was Laufeia to her Medullina, I became the living slave of Eros.

She wailed and whimpered, giving me full play upon her flesh. A dozen times her brown hips flailed the air as she went into her orgasm. She would have tried to flee, so sweet and so debilitating was this ecstasy, but her legs were so rubbery it was easy to push her down again on the blankets.

Lumm was helpless. I was all over her, I slid her sideways and then on her front. I bit her, laved her flesh with my tongue. I kissed and whispered words in her ears that made her quiver all over. Through some of this, toward the end, she begged me to stop, she was exhausted, her love flesh ached and throbbed.

I was merciless, until I noted that the night darkness outside the tent was fading, that there was a pallid light beyond the flaps. Then I pulled up a blanket and covered her. She fell sound asleep, she began snoring.

I moved toward the back of the tent, where the canvas flapped loosely. I got down on my hands and knees and had a look around outside by poking my head under the edge. The jungle seemed absolutely empty. Certainly, there were no guards around.

I got myself into a shirt and some slacks that Lumm had brought along for her own use. I stuck my feet into walking boots. I found a cartridge belt and a holstered automatic—the 1910 Mauser—and strapped it about my middle.

Then I crawled out of the tent.

Coming to my feet, I raced off into the jungle. I knew

the Pathet Lao would be after me when the camp woke up. My one hope was to get the hell away from there in a hurry.

I had no way of knowing which way I was going. The sun to my side told me I was moving north, however, so I swiveled around and ran with the sun in my eyes to the east. I told myself the Bolovens plateau and the Temple of the Thousand Deaths lay in that direction.

It was late afternoon when I heard a rifle shot.

The bullet was aimed at me. It clipped a twig from a tree directly in front of me, about the height of my head. Four inches to the right and I would have been dead.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I ran blindly under the rattan vines and between the boles of the towering tapang trees, slipping on the wet-slick fern leaves that rotted and crumbled along a narrow game trail. My breath was practically nonexistent, my heart was in my throat and clogging my windpipe. Sweat was an uncomfortable wetness on my blouse and my legs ached with the strain of all-day walking.

My hand went to the butt of the Mauser in its black leather holster bobbing on my hip. I drew the gun, intending to sell my life as dearly as possible. I had faced death before, many times, but facing it this deep in these jungles seemed a little worse than ever before.

I halted, peered along my back trail.

I could see nothing, but I knew the Pathet Lao were experienced jungle fighters, expert guerrillas. Any tree, any bush I looked at, might be hiding one of them. Certainly an animal hadn't fired that shot at me.

I crouched down, peering between the wait-a-bit vines.

Maybe the guerrillas were listening for me to make a sound. Maybe one of them had fired at where he thought he heard me blundering my way along the narrow game trail. The jungles were quiet now, except for a leopard screaming in the distance.

I waited. If they were on my back trail, those Pathet Lao boys would put in an appearance. They didn't disappoint me.

I saw part of a black pajama sleeve first. I raised the gun and held my breath. In moments, the upper half of the pajamas came into view. A little brown man stood there, looking around him. The advance guard? I firmed my lips and raised the gun.

My finger squeezed the trigger.

The little man went backward as if someone had pushed him. He did not even make a sound. The birds and monkeys screeched and chattered for a while, then the jungle fell silent again.

Carefully, I moved on, trotting along the narrow trail.

I ran forever, it seemed. Actually, it was probably no more than a mile. In these jungles, with the dense undergrowth, amid the root systems of half a hundred different types of trees, an invisible hand seemed always to be catching at my ankles. I stumbled and staggered and almost fell, every dozen feet or so.

The guerrillas were used to the jungle trails, they ran them as I might have run on a sidewalk in Cannes. Their slippers feet pad-padded along and now and then I was able to make out their voices behind me.

I stumbled upon a brook that ran lightly across its bottom stones. It was twenty feet across. During that time I would be exposed to the oncoming Pathet Lao. I could not turn back, the jungles on either side of me were too impenetrable to permit passing without being heard.

I drew a deep breath. It was go on, or die.

My feet carried me into the sea almost without my awareness. The water was shockingly cold; maybe this was a good thing, it made me run faster. I was close to the other side when the guerrillas came out of the forest.

Their wild cries of delight acted as a whip across my buttocks. I scrambled out of the brook, I started up the bank, slipping and sliding. Behind me I could hear the little men in their black pajamas as they came for me.

“Dee mark! Dee mark!” they screeched.

I gathered it was a cry of approval, for they plunged in after me, grinning and yelling. My head swiveled around, I saw about a dozen of them. Too many for me to stop, the Mauser only had three shells left.

I fell face-down on the bank, tripping on a stone.

“Good girl,” said a voice.

An automatic assault rifle opened up right over my head. I shook to its vibrations and turned to stare at the guerrillas. My rescuer had caught them out in the open, racing light-heartedly across the stream to grab me. They wanted me alive, to tie to a stake and torture, so I really couldn’t summon up very much sympathy for them as those leaden pellets raked their chests and middles.

They bucked and jerked, they flopped into the water, staining it red with their blood. Their faces were contorted in grotesque surprise. They stood a moment, a few of them, bodies jerking as if to the frug, then they fell backward or sideways and lay beside their dead fellows.

In seconds, it was over. The little men in the black pajamas had been sitting ducks out there in the open.

I knelt and stared at the green fronds and ferns that hid everything but the blue-black muzzle of the automatic assault rifle from my eyes. I guess tears were run-

ning down my checks, because I just couldn't get my tongue to work right.

"Who're you?" I asked inelegantly.

A chuckle was my answer. "Come along, ducks. Up you go. I don't know whether any more of those Pathet Lao bastards are on your back trail, but I don't want to be caught here. So up you get."

I could not believe my ears. My female curiosity was aroused, I could no more have gone on kneeling there than I could have jumped to the moon. I got to my feet and scrambled up the bank, grabbing handholds on the little vines that hung down, here and there.

It was Neal Harding, all right, bending to stretch out a hand for me to grab. His brown face grinned at me as his fingers tightened. The small knapsack on his back gave a little jerk as he tugged me upward.

"Glad to see me?" he laughed.

"I sure as hell am! But what are you doing out here?"

"Saw them kidnap you, pet. I've had my eyes on you ever since you walked out of the apartment on your way to save the Prince. Told Pheng I needed some air. Saw you kill that man with the knife, saw you fight off those three attackers—you're a regular hurricane when you go into action!—and I watched while they dragged you into that car."

"You didn't!"

"Indeed I did, pet. I wanted to make sure you didn't go running off without me."

His hand gestured me to silence as he guided me between some towering pandanus roots and onto a narrow game trail. His teeth flashed whitely in his bronzed face as he made a motion, telling me to hit that trail ahead of him.

I jogged along as fast as I could move the Drum legs. I just didn't have the breath to ask questions and run too, so I concentrated on movement. We must have run

for damn near an hour, or until my legs started going wobbly, before he called a halt.

I sank down on the ground, red-faced and sweating. My hair was dank and snarled. Altogether, I made a most unlovely sight, I am sure. My blouse was wet, my legs were muddy. I felt like bawling.

Neal Harding stood over me and nodded sympathetically. "A hard time you've had, ducks. I know a little about it. You see, I went after that car when those goons pushed you into it. I waited until I saw you tossed into that donkey cart."

"Why didn't you raise the alarm?" I panted.

"No time. Too many of them. Besides, I had plans for you and me. We're both bound for the same place, right? The Temple of the Thousand Deaths? I need you, Eve. So I figured, since the donkey cart was headed in that general direction, I'd let them take you out of Bangkok while I followed solo."

"They didn't notice you?"

"Nobody notices old Neal when he doesn't want them to, in these jungles. I've lived and hunted here since I was a boy. I know them backside front. They couldn't make good time in a donkey cart. I had plenty of hours to go back and get my gear and bring it with me when I set out after you. Those cart wheels squeaked loudly enough to wake the dead. I followed about half an hour behind you."

I stared up at him curiously, "Last night, you saw Lumm and me?"

"And the stake. I heard her threats. I listened for a little while to what you two were doing in the tent."

I flushed, I guess. I said weakly. "I did it so to make sure she would be fast asleep when I escaped."

He nodded gravely. "I know that. It just confirms what I've felt about you all along, you're smart as a buggywhip and twice as brave. You made my job easy,

you got out of the tent by yourself I didn't have to go in after you."

The big adventurer propped his back against a treebole. "I admit I was a bit puzzled as to how I was going to free you. Frankly, I don't have the guts to tackle forty or fifty men in open combat, all by myself. I might have found a way to do it, if I'd had to. When I saw you slipping out from under that tent, I damned near let go with a 'cheerio.' "

"After that, it was easy. Once you were on the game trail, and since I knew where that game trail went, it was easy to stay ahead of you, to cover your escape if the Pathet Lao followed. I figured it would be a sticky business, but when you got as far as that little stream, I knew it was going to be cream pie."

I cocked an eyebrow at him. "You're pretty sure of yourself."

"I have good reason to be. Nobody's ever beaten me at getting anything I wanted, ever since I've been fifteen. They won't now, either. I want the Eye of Buddha. You'll help me get it. Your reward is going to be the tin can with the data in it that you want. Fair enough?"

"Fair enough," I grinned.

My eyes went down over my unlovely dirtiness, and I sighed. "I'd like a bath," I told him. "And I've got to wash these duds and let them dry. I feel a mess."

"A nice mess, Eve. Nobody wears evening gowns in these wilds, remember. So cheer up. We'll camp somewhere near a pool. You can have your bath there."

"Camp?" I echoed. "You mean you've got a tent and all the fixings? But you couldn't have known where I'd go, to put it there ahead of time."

He chuckled. "I have 'camps' scattered all around these jungles. Little tents rolled up and stuck in the crotches of trees or under rocks or inside caves. A tent

and cooking pots, extra ammo, all the necessities. I have one up near Chiengmai, another outside Phet Buri, still another on the Mergui Archipelago. Oh, I'm well-protected against emergencies."

"I can come and go as I like, mostly, just carrying a rifle and a bandolier of cartridges. I've learned to live off the land during the years. You now, are another matter. I can feed you easily enough, but being a woman, you'll want to sleep in a tent. Otherwise the snakes may get you."

I shuddered and mentally cursed my job.

After a time he asked, "You rested?"

I managed to get to my feet, muttering, "As much as I'll ever be without a good night's sleep. Heave off, MacDuff."

His hand waved. "You go up front. I'll call directions. Travel as fast as you can, but don't overdo."

I started trotting.

It wasn't too bad, really. Neal Harding oozed confidence and some of it slipped off on me. He knew these jungles, he was as alert as any animal. The twisted roots of the huge tapang trees, the tallest in the jungle world, were not so mysterious when he lectured me about them as he trotted. The strangler fig, for instance, killed the host tree around which it curled itself, tightening its coils as might a boa constrictor, and taking over once the life had been crushed from that tree.

We trotted in a perpetual greenery, where the humid air fed water to the trees and their roots, to the big ferns and the forest shrubs. Sunlight rarely penetrated these arboreal depths, except for a chance sunbeam or two striking golden glints off a climbing palm.

It was a remote world, all green and hushed.

Our feet padded along the same trail used by such animals as the tiny muntjac deer and the leopard that hunts it. I might have been worried when I saw the

padmarks of a leopard except that Neal Harding called out cheerily to me, telling me they were old marks, and that Mister Spots had probably deserted these tropical forests for drier country.

We seemed to be the only human life here. I heard the cries of a gibbon, the squeaks emitted by a flying draco, the twitterings of birds. There are over five hundred species of birds in Southwest Asia, the adventurer informed me, and more than two hundred species of snakes.

There are flying geckos, flying frogs, flying dracos, flying squirrels and flying colugos. At one time, the ground below these trees was covered with water. To survive, since they couldn't scamper along the jungle floor when it was all water, these tiny creatures learned to glide through the air. "Even certain snakes can glide through the air," Harding added with a chuckle.

All this didn't make me feel too good. I kept looking for snakes under my feet until he told me to forget about them, they knew this was a game trail, they rarely crossed it lest the cloven hooves of a gaur or a muntjac cut them in half.

It was almost dusk when we came to a tree whose crotch was about eight feet above the ground. There was a brown canvas sheet, fat and heavy, strapped by ropes to the forking treeboles.

While I sat on the trail, Harding climbed the tree and undid knots. He lowered the tent and its equipment to the ground. Descending, he lifted the roll and slung it over a shoulder.

"There's an open space up in front, with a nice deep pool," he informed me, shifting the pack to a more comfortable position. "Just keep going along the trail. The animals use the pool for drinking purposes but we'll camp well across from their waterhole."

I went froward for about three hundred yards, then the jungle fell away and I stood on a shelving mud beach, staring at a forest pool which must have been at least a hundred yards long and fifty wide. It was a tiny lake, actually. On the rim of the water was a grassy knoll, about forty yards away.

"That's it," said Neal at my elbow. "Where we camp."

My feet slogged along the muddy ground where the animals came to drink, until the grass came down to meet them. Then it was easier, cleaner going. I eyed the water with plain desire. I wanted into that cool blue stuff.

"After I fill the canteens," Harding laughed, reading my mind.

He dumped the tent on the ground, began working at the ropes and knots holding it together. I got down on my knees and helped him. In short order we had the tent rolled flat on the grass, disclosing two big canteens, some cooking pots and various other assorted paraphernalia that a man like Harding might need on his jungle excursions.

He took the canteens to the edge of the lake, washed them and filled them with the cool water. He was very painstaking, he would not let me help him. They had to be filled properly, there might be waterholes where we were going but he was taking no chances.

Finally he stood up, nodding. "All right, go ahead. Have your bath. I'll start the fire and get the tent up."

"Can't I help you? I want to pull my weight."

"You can do up afterwards. I cook, I peg down the tent, you wash." He added with a wry grin, "However, you can watch me, so in case anything happens to me, you won't be altogether helpless."

I undid the buttons on the khaki blouse I wore. I

shrugged it off, knowing damn well I was making my unharnessed breasts bounce up and down but not caring. Besides, I figured that Pheng Putar had drained him of all his sexual needs for quite a while. Anyhow, it couldn't be helped, we weren't at the Claridge of London we were all alone in a Thailand rain forest, and if he got a gander at the naked Drum bod—well, hell!

I heard him gasp when I bent over to thrust my slacks down past my pallid hips. My breasts swung out, quivering. He got a good look at my buttocks, too. And at my shapely legs as well.

I dropped the slacks and walked toward the lake. I did not look at him as I strode along but I knew damn well his eyes were eating at my nudity. "Better get me a towel, Neal. It's going to be chilly when I come out of there."

I dove in, the water surrounded my body and caressed it with its coolness. I swam lazily, shaking back my long yellow hair so I could see. There may have been fish that nipped at girls or snakes that took bites out of them in this water, but for the nonce, I just didn't care. It was too marvelous, swimming here.

The place was like Eden, I guess. Adam and Eve all alone in a jungle world. Too bad Neal Harding wasn't David Anderjanian. We might have made it a real paradise, together. Still. . . .

I cavorted in the lake for half an hour. By that time the tent was up and pegged, and the smell of roasting meat and baking bread was tantalizing to my nostrils. I sighed and started swimming shoreward.

Neal Harding came to meet me, carrying a towel. His eyes raked my wet shoulders as I started wading out of the water. I had no shame, if we were going to trek to the Bolovens plateau we were going to be intimate out of forced proximity.

If he wanted to torture himself, let him. I came upward steadily, knowing his stare was glued to my shaking breasts, to my lean middle and dimpled bellybutton, to my curving hips and to the blonde thatch that lay between my thighs. Naked on the grass, I reached for the towel. .

“Push your eyeballs back into place,” I told him.

He nodded vaguely, a little glassy-eyed. I almost felt sorry for him. We were business partners, no more. I give him credit, he didn’t make a pass at me. Later, I was to learn why not.

Neal Harding conducted himself like a gentleman. He had found a flattish rock and rolled it into place so I could sit in comparative comfort and eat the meat and baked biscuits and drink the tea that bubbled merrily over the fire.

I marveled at his efficiency. “Where’d you get it?” I asked as he passed me a tin plate with a sizzling steak on it.

“I carried it from Bangkok. In my knapsack. With some flour. I figured I might not have a chance to hunt until I got you safely away from Lady Lumm, so I came prepared to eat well until I did. After this, we may have to make do with squirrel meat. Or monkey flesh, unless I’m lucky enough to shoot a muntjac.”

I guess I made a wry face, because he laughed. “Their meat isn’t so bad. You won’t find it tough or stringy, not the way I cook it. I’m a great believer in the creature comforts. I’ve brought along a good supply of flour. When it runs out, I can always buy some at a Thai village.”

“Lumm and her boys steal their food, demanding that the villagers give it to them under threat of getting shot.”

Harding nodded. “That’s their way. I have mine.”

We talked about the war in Viet Nam, about the

American air bases in Thailand, about the Pathet Lao that had penetrated Thailand and Laos. I was surprised to learn that he sided with the United States in what it was doing, trying to keep the Commies from overrunning all of Southeast Asia.

"Why not? First Southeast Asia, then the Straits Settlements and Australia. The rest of the world just doesn't realize nothing but force is going to stop Red China from taking what it wants."

We gabbed about the outside world, too. With the Eye of Buddha, the adventurer was going to come out of his forest world for a couple of years to live it up in London and Nice. He was tired of the vice dens of Bangkok. He wanted to see European women and bed down with them, to sample food that gourmet cooks turned out in such world-renowned eateries as Simpson's of London or the Tour d'Argent in Paris.

"I dream of dining on ragout of pork au vin rouge on a winter's evening, or lazing over melon and prosciutto at a Riviera beach resort." He had my mouth watering as he added with a grin, "How about crépes Barbara with ice cream the way they're served at Walterspiel's in Munich? Or sampling oranges in wine at—"

"Stop it," I moaned. "I'm suffering enough out here without your adding to it. Basically, I'm a glamor girl, Neal—more at home in a bed of sin, if you must know, than in a tent bed. So please—have a heart!"

He grinned and raised both hands, palms toward me. "Enough, then. I promise, no more daydreaming about world famous dishes."

He rummaged in his canvas jacket, bringing out a battered briar pipe and a tobacco pouch. He filled the bowl, he struck a match, and we sat there like an old married couple while he smoked. When my eyelids got too heavy to fight, I got up and staggered toward the tent.

“’Night,” I called.

“’Night.”

I slept like a corpse.

Next morning Neal lifted the tent flaps. “Hey, lazy—it’s half an hour past dawn. We have a long way to go.”

I shrugged into my dried slacks and shirt, smelling the freshly fried fish Harding had caught with a twig, a line and a bent hook. As we breakfasted, I decided the fish—whatever it was—tasted even better than it had smelled.

It was nice, having a man along to cook and do for me. I figured I was living in a comparative lap of luxury.

We began hiking as soon as the tent was rolled, with all the camping gear inside it. It made a good load, but Neal Harding was big and strong. He shrugged off my offers to carry something. He was used to it, we could make better time if he played pack horse. He was right.

We had a long way to go, we were roughly fifty miles south of Korat, we had about three hundred miles to travel. Neal figured it would take us close to two weeks to make the journey. “About a fortnight,” was the way he put it. I started trudging off along the shore of the little lake with his words ringing in my ears.

Two weeks of walking around in a rain forest was not my idea of fun, but it was my job, so I determined to make the most of it. Having Neal Harding striding behind me would make it easier. I honestly don’t know how I could have done it on my own.

He was courteous to the point of chivalry, always considerate and always cheerful. When I wanted to sit down and die, his grin made me keep on going. He did not drive me, he coaxed and cajoled me into being a brave girl.

My feet were so sore at night for the first few days that I cried myself to sleep over them. Neal gave me

two pairs of his socks, and made me change them twice a day and launder them at night so they would be clean for the next day's march.

Gradually, my body became toughened to the going. I even grew to recognize the varying cries of the birds and their names. I learned a little trailcraft and once I even shot a muntjac deer, one afternoon.

The muntjac gives out a barking sound not unlike that of a dog, at sunrise and sunset, and when frightened. Hunters trail it by these barks. It can run very fast and is quite at home in these rain forests.

At first, I thought it was a dog, but the look Neal Harding gave me told me it was something more important to us. He handed me the rifle, raising his eyebrows. I nodded, assuring him I could handle it. Harding himself slipped off into the bush to act as a beater.

Within seconds the little animal—the muntjac stands only about two and a half feet high—came into view. I raised the rifle, I told myself it would make good eating, and fired. Afterward, seeing it lying there so tiny and helpless, I cried a little, but I made sure the big adventurer did not see me; to his way of thinking, animals had been placed on the earth by the good Lord to keep us human beings alive.

Fifteen days after we had started on the trail Neal and I came in sight of the Temple of the Thousand Deaths. Suddenly the jungle ended in a small clearing and in that clearing—its stones cracked and tumbled by the thick roots of the huge tapang tree that had been planted hundreds of years before —was the *wat*.

Those bare roots were like skeletal fingers trying to engulf the temple itself. Sight of them sent a cold chill down my back. It seemed to me that the very forest was claiming the *wat* as its own.

And now the temple was waiting to kill me as the forest had the *wat*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I walked around the compound, still feeling cold and frightened. I could make out a skeleton sprawled on the flagstoned pathway leading into the temple. It was all that was left of poor John Meadows, I knew. It was not a happy emotion I was enduring, staring at his skeleton.

The insects had picked it clean.

"Scavenger ants," Neal Harding told me. "They're great at policing the area, you know. They take the meat off a man in a matter of hours."

"For God's sake—please!" I screamed.

"Oh. Yes. You knew him. Sorry about that."

I tiptoed past the skeleton, went as far as I dared toward the entrance of the *wat*. The interior was shadowed but I could still make out the dead body of the Red Chinese Sung Yen. He too, was a skeleton inside his quilted jacket. The thought touched my mind that these voracious insects were everywhere.

"Got any ideas?" Harding said.

"Why," I said slowly, "Can those scavenger ants you mentioned get about in the temple without any harm befalling them. Why?"

His broad shoulders shrugged. "Beats me."

I said, "I need time to think."

"Good. I'll make camp and get dinner ready."

I planted my rump on a block of tumbled stone unseated by a tapang root and brooded at the inside of the temple. The curse apparently did not extend to all life inside the *wat*. Insects were safe. Men were not. Why? I got up and walked toward the temple, standing in the doorway where it seemed safe enough, and tried to peer inside.

The light was dim; what there was of it peeped in through cracks in the temple where the tapang roots had torn apart the stone blocks and the pillars. I went back and got a flashlight, played it around inside.

I saw many skeletons, both of men and of animals.

I frowned, thinking.

Over dinner I said to Neal, "They were all skeletons of the bigger animals, if I can be sure of what I saw. Monkeys, orang-utans, gibbons, beasts like that. No squirrels, at least none that I could see."

"Size, then," he answered. "Whatever's big enough—gets killed."

"It could be weight. Whatever's heavy enough."

We sat sipping tea and thinking until it was time for me to hit my impromtu bed in the tent. I told Neal I would need some rope and a strong metal hook first thing in the morning. Then I got up, stretched and yawned and headed for my sleeping quarters.

The day was sunny and clear when I woke. Even the humidity seemed to have lessened a little, or maybe I was getting used to it. I found myself rested, eager to get at the temple. I thought I knew now why everyone who ran into that cursed temple got himself killed.

The dead animals were the tip-off.

There was no curse as such, on the *wat*.

No god would bother to kill an orang-utan.

Something inside the temple that operated in response to size or weight was the villain of the piece. Since people had not possessed electric eyes in those dim days when the temple had been built, I figured what set off the curse was the weight of a person. He tipped some sort of balance wheel; and that was it, brother.

I moved out into the daylight, tucking my shirt into my slacks. Neal was sitting by the campfire, tying a knot from a length of rope onto a big iron hook. He looked up at sight of me, grinning.

“Ready for the big test?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be. Oh, no food, thanks. I want to make the run on an empty stomach.”

He finished his own breakfast and reached for his rifle. When he saw my glance, he explained. “Just in case there’s somebody living in that place who does the killing. Maybe its guardianship has come down from father to son through the years. I don’t know, I’m just guessing. But I’m taking no chances.”

I took the coiled rope from him and walked ahead of him toward the entrance, skirting the skeleton of John Meadows. I went right up to the carved doorway and peered inside.

Sunlight illuminated the temple interior like a battery of floodlights. I saw the Buddha seated above the altar and the huge green emerald set into its forehead. Below the statue was a long, flat altar on which offerings to Gautama could be made by his worshippers. Slender stone pillars made a tiny forest throughout much of the interior. The floor was fashioned of brilliantly inlaid mosaic tiles that formed a Wheel of the Law, which was symbolic of the Eightfold Path of Buddha.

I looked up. The ceiling was also in tiles, some of which had broken and fallen off during the centuries. More important than the tilework, however, was the vinework done in stone that twisted up some of the pillars and formed loops that decorated the ceiling, here and there.

I could swing a hook over those stone loops. My only worry was, would the old stone hold my weight? I am not a fat girl, anything but, and my weeks on the trail in these humid jungles had trimmed me down even more. I doubted if I weighed a hundred pounds. If those loops did not hold me, and broke, I was one dead Eve Drum.

I uncoiled the rope.

Neal growled, "Here, let me swing that. You may not be able to get it as far as I can."

His head nodded at the flat altar and the statue. I could make out sunlight glinting on something small and metallic a few feet in front of the altar, close by the skeleton of a gibbon. It was the tin can that held the Red Chinese invasion plans.

"A proper cast, and you can get both the emerald and your tin can at the same time," the adventurer was saying, slowly swinging the iron hook.

"By the bye, how come you have an iron hook in your gear?" I asked, just to make conversation.

"Comes in handy, ducks--when you have to get to a rooftop," he chuckled. "I discovered I needed just this sort of thing once in Singapore, when I was after the pretty wife of a petty administrator. She was anxious for the rendezvous, I was anxious, but there were people all over her ruddy house who mustn't see me."

The hook was swinging faster.

"Being in Singapore, it was easy enough to buy this thing. I've kept it with me ever since."

"She must have been worth it," I giggled.

"Rather. I went back every night for a week."

He let go the hook. It went flying upward toward the ceiling. It missed its target by a foot and fell heavily to the floor. Neal pulled it back to him, began swinging it for a second cast.

"This may take a bit of doing," he nodded.

He made it on his fifth toss. The iron hook fell over a stone loop and settled into place. It resisted a couple of hard tugs the adventurer gave it.

"All right, pet. The rest is up to you. Go on, grab hold. I'll hang on to this end, to give you room to get started."

I drew a deep breath and put my hands on the rope. I swung outward, trying to clamber up the rope as fast as

possible. My body would surely have hit the floor—I couldn't climb fast enough to prevent that—if Neal hadn't been hanging on an end.

"Easy, easy, I've got you," he called.

I brushed the floor with my behind and yelped.

"I'll hoist the rope a bit more. There. You're safe enough. Nothing happened. Just concentrate on climbing. That's the girl, ducks."

Once I had the knack of it, I was a regular monkey on that rope. I skidaddled upward and when I was high enough Neal let go. I swung back and forth over the temple floor with its grisly burdens and found that when I came to rest, I was midway between the tin can and the statue of Buddha.

I began to swing back and forth.

Being at the level of the huge emerald—up this close it was absolutely gigantic—I suppose I should have made my try for that, first. But since I knew I would never get out of this place alive if Neal Harding didn't help me, I made my grab for the tin can.

If I had the emerald on my person, he would make damn certain I came out of the *wat* alive and well. Not that I didn't trust him. I was just playing it safe.

I slid by legs and hands down the rope. I turned over slowly, head hanging, and reached downward. My fingers wrapped themselves about the tin can.

Up this close, I got a good look at the mosaic floor. There were little slits between some of the mosaic work, cleverly disguised. Unless you were this close to them, you would never in the world have seen them.

Gingerly, I used the tin can to press down on the floor. Nothing happened. I put more of my weight on the tin can.

Up between the little crevices came what seemed to be sharp dagger-points. Each was covered with some sort of dried goo, possibly a long-range-acting poison

that the priests of this *wat* had smeared on those points three or four centuries ago. One stab from a dagger-point and you'd had it. Apparently various sections of the floor went downward, here and there, when anything above a certain weight touched it. The insects were too light to trigger the mechanism, certain gibbons and orang-utans were large enough.

I breathed a sigh, swung about on the rope and headed upward. When I could rest my weight on a loop of rope twined about my foot, I called to the adventurer.

"Here, Neal—catch!"

I tossed the tin can underhanded. Its metallic sides caught a sunbeam or two as it arched through the air. It hit the floor in front of the big Englishman and rolled toward him. He bent down and picked it up, nodding happily at me.

"Great work, Eve. Great! Now the emerald."

"It's a beauty, all right," I called back.

I started swinging back and forth, a la Tarzan. Closer and closer I swung to the statue. Up this close, I began to wonder if maybe the priests hadn't found another diabolical way to protect the Buddha in case some clever thief managed to get past the floor trap.

This did me no good. I started to shake.

Back and forth I swung, studying the statue and its huge emerald. I took so long that Neal shouted from the doorway, "What's wrong?"

"The emerald may be booby-trapped, too."

I heard him curse, and joined him mentally with a few expletives of my own. It would do neither of us any good to come this far and fail. But I could not see closely enough, going back and forth. I had to do some careful scrutiny.

I angled my swing until I was over the statue. Gripping the rope with one hand, I lowered my feet to the

head of the huge statue. From its head I slid them down until I was resting both soles on the shoulders.

In this position—while hanging onto that rope for dear life!—I bent forward and studied the emerald. I saw only the smooth, unbroken forehead and face of Buddha. The emerald gleamed like green fire in the middle of the forehead. There were no slots out of which any poisoned dagger-blades could come thrusting.

Breathing more confidently, I put my free hand on the emerald and gripped it. I started to twist it. It came free in my hand.

“Eve!” screamed Neal Harding. “Jump!”

I raised my head. Three loud twaaangs sounded almost at once. From hidden recesses in the wall, three slim javelins came shooting for me.

I stood frozen in surprise. Too long.

Two hundred years back, I would have been one dead girl. Maybe even only one hundred years back. But the mechanisms that fired those javelins—the priests must have used some sort of catapult string hidden behind those stone walls—had eroded with Time. The javelins started for me but the twisted hemp must have been so rotted that the strings could not do their job.

One javelin curved and fell twenty feet away. A second made it to within ten feet of me.

The third one almost got me but it dropped at the last second, hit the shoulder of the statue an inch below my left foot and clanged downward onto the floor.

I stood there, sweating and shaking.

I was a damned scared girl, believe me. My ears picked up the sound of my thudding heart and the fluent curses that fell from Neal Harding’s lips. A glance from my baby blues showed him sagged against the entryway jamb.

The sight of me with a whole skin put the adrenalin back into his system. "Why the hell didn't you jump when I yelled?" he roared.

"I was too surprised," I yelled back.

Fortunately, my left hand still held the rope. I guess I had been too surprised to let go. I took a few deep breaths, tucked the emerald into my slacks pocket and put both hands on the rope.

"Here I come," I yelled.

I went swinging outward over the floor. I used my feet against the statue on my swing-back, to control my swinging motion so that pretty soon I was rocking back and forth, toward and away from the entrance. With one hand, still hanging onto that rope with the other hand and both legs, I gathered up the dangling rope below me.

I swung the end toward Neal Harding when my swing reached a point nearest him. He grabbed for it with both hands but missed.

Again I did the throwing bit and this time he caught it.

"Hold it high," I cried.

No need to warn him. He wanted me alive and well and out of danger just as much as I did. I had the emerald on me. Neal raised the rope and held it above his head. His muscles must have bulged to the breaking point, but he did it. I guess the idea of a fortune coming along a rope to him inspired him more than somewhat.

My toes scraped the mosaic work.

I let go and dropped into his arms, slamming into his front. His arms went around me, holding me. I was shaking like the proverbial leaf in a gale. I even bawled a little, rubbing my tear-wet face on his khaki shirt.

"Easy now, ducks," he crooned. "It's all over. You did fine, better than anybody else could have done. You

have your tin can and I have my emerald and we're both walking on water at the moment. Easy, easy."

I shivered some more, until I grew aware that my breasts poking into his chest and my girl-girl belly into his middle, was making Neal Harding remember that he was a man. He stood at attention in awareness of the fact that, while I might have lost a few pounds, I was still eminently qualified to pass as a female.

"Ooooops," I giggled, pushing away. "Sorry about that, Neal."

"Don't be," he grinned. "I'm enjoying every inch of it."

Reluctantly, his arms let me go. There was a funny look on his face, not just that of the excited male who realized he cannot have any of the goodies. There was some other emotion eating inside the big adventurer.

I didn't find out what it was until my hand had dug into my slacks pocket and lifted out the emerald. I held it out to him; he took it.

"Now for my share," I grinned, extending my hand.

"Uh-uh, no," he said, staring at the emerald.

"Stop playing games," I said. "Give me the can."

"I'll hold onto it, ducks," he told me.

I guess I stared at him like a ninny. I could read that other emotion now, all right. Loud and clear. It was greed.

"You see," he went on, "I've decided that I could sell what's in the tin can for a small fortune. Maybe a million dollars or so. Red China would pay me that to buy it back. Your United States would pay me that to lay hands on it. Why should I give up a million dollars?"

I hacked at his neck with the edge of my hand, in a karate blow that had never failed me yet. The only trouble was, Neal was expecting it. I remembered too late he had seen me finish off those two goons in Bangkok whom Lady Lumm had sent to kill or capture me.

His fist caught me in the belly, below my slacks belt. A foul blow in any boxing event, but the Englishman was not boxing. He was out to keep the emerald and the tin can.

I went backward and flopped around on the ground and was sick. The adventurer stood there like a stone-man, watching my convulsions of pain.

"Don't do that again," he snarled.

His eyes were cold, his sun-bronzed face twisted savagely. This was a side of Neal Harding he had never let me see.

"I—I thought—we were pa-partners," I gasped.

"Sure you did. I wanted you to. Oh, I'm not going to kill you, ducks. Just use you a little—as I used you in that temple. You're going to be my slave for a while, until we reach what passes for a civilized outpost in this neck of the woods. Behave yourself, and I may even mail you some money in exchange for your services."

I lay on the ground holding my bruised belly and stared up at him. I had taken off the cartridge belt and holstered gun which I'd borrowed from Lady Lumm, to cut down on my weight while doing my rope-swing bit. I was unarmed. I was defenseless. My better judgment told me I had no chance against this big bruiser right now. I had better play it cagey.

"Whatever you say, boss," I grinned wryly.

His eyes raked me suspiciously. At last he smiled and nodded his head. "Good girl. You're being smart. We'll get along fine, you and I—if you'll let us."

"You're the master," I murmured meekly.

He backed off a few feet. "Get up," he snapped.

He could have offered me a hand, but I guess he figured it would be better not to get within reach of my hands and feet at the moment. So I made it upright all by myself. My belly hurt like hell, but I decided I would live.

"Eat," he growled.

I sank down and reached for the scrambled eggs on the breakfast menu. I didn't know what kind of birds' eggs these were, I assumed he had robbed a nest before dawn, but the eggs were delicious. So were the biscuits he had baked, and the tea he had made.

I ate because I wanted to keep up my strength. While I munched, Neal sat on a rock a dozen feet away and examined his emerald. It was a big one, all right, easily sixty karats. I stared at it, too.

He caught my gaze and held the jewel up between forefinger and thumb. The sunlight caught it, made it blaze. "I know a rajah or two who might pay what this thing is worth. Otherwise, it may have to be cut up for the London market."

"A shame," I sighed. "It's really beautiful."

Neal glanced at me sharply. I guess he had figured he was going to have a hysterical female on his hands. Not me. I could do nothing about my situation at the moment, so I had decided I might as well ride with the punches. I even grinned at him, making him blink.

"You don't seem too upset," he muttered.

"Why should I be? You have the upper hand, there isn't anything I can do about it. So why get up tight? Relax and enjoy it, as they say you should do when you're getting raped."

He grinned at me. "You keep that attitude, ducks—and I'll cut you in on some of the loot. Hell, there's plenty here. Maybe we could even go into partnership."

I nodded, finishing the last of the tea. "Could be. I'm a sensible girl, I can listen to reason. I'm a little tired of the secret agent bit, anyhow."

He stood up, "All right, break camp."

I did what I could do, washing pots and plates. I guess Neal realized I would never be able to handle the tent, so he did that. At a safe distance, I might add. He

didn't want me jumping him. When he was done with the roll, he pointed at it.

"Carry it," he said.

"I can't," I protested.

"You'd better, or you stay behind."

I carried it.

At first it was not as heavy as I'd thought it would be, but after I walked a mile, it weighed ten tons. I staggered and slid along the game trail with Neal on my heels, sagging visibly. I sweated, I cursed under my breath, I felt as if my shaking legs were getting ready to disown me.

There was a method in his madness, I soon found out.

When I had walked about three miles with that rolled tent and all our gear, I fell face-down. I just lay there, panting and sobbing.

A hand removed the roll, then yanked me to my feet.

"Walk!" he called.

I walked, like a zombie. Neal Harding figured that if he exhausted me, I would have no energy left to try a sneak attack. How right he was! We covered about twelve miles that first day after leaving the Temple of the Thousand Deaths.

I could hardly eat dinner, I was so tired. As a matter of fact, I fell asleep over my second cup of tea.

When I woke up, my arms were embracing a treebole and my wrists were tied together. I had been staked out like this after I had gone beddy-bye. I could move around, but only slightly.

I shrugged and went back to sleep.

Neal raised me from the dead by shaking my shoulder. I let my eyes open blearily. "Breakfast, ducks," he grinned.

I ate like the trained monkey I was becoming. I didn't even protest when he made me clean camp and

hoist the rolled tent and our gear to a shoulder again. I marched out along the game trail like I was told.

I only made a mile and a half, this second day. My muscles were so sore it was an effort to walk. Even after he had shouldered the pack, it hurt to move my legs. I lurched and plodded along in actual pain.

Neal camped early this night. We found a small stream of water that widened into a pool, toward four o'clock. There was a grassy stretch that made a good site for the tent. While I lay stretched out on my back on the ground, the Englishman pitched it.

"Up, slave," he said firmly.

I raised my head. I stared at his body, naked to the waist. He laughed at my expression.

"We're going to take a bath, ducks. Come and undress me. I feel like a master at the moment--and you're a very attractive slavegirl."

I moaned, "Oh, no."

He came over and gripped my hand, knowing damn well I was in no shape to put up a fight. I sort of sagged against him when he got me to my feet.

"You have too many clothes on," he breathed.

His hands went to the buttons of my khaki shirt, began undoing them. My breasts came into view as he folded back the blouse flaps. He stared at what he was seeing with wide eyes.

"By God, you have gorgeous teats!" he exclaimed.

His fingers brushed the nipples, made them stiff. His palms cupped my pale globes, lifting them. He shook them gently, up and down, then removed his hands. They jiggled on their own for a while.

His head bent, his lips kissed each nipple hungrily. He was starting to pant, nursing on me. His hands were on my bare sides under the shirt, caressing me. Against my will, there was a fire building in my loins. It had been a long time for me, too.

I groaned a little, my head moving back and forth.

"Me, ducks—me!" he gasped.

My hands went to his belt buckle, undid it. I was a little out of my head from weariness, from the arousal of my flesh. I actually felt like a slavegirl attending my master. My fingers unzipped him.

Then I hesitated. I could hurt him like crazy if I reached into his open fly and grabbed his manhood. I did not want to hurt Neal Harding. I needed him to get me to civilization. Alone, I would have died in this damn rain forest.

Besides, if I could get him to trust me, maybe a few days from now I might be able to take him by surprise. When I knew where to go on my own, that is.

So I made my fingers tender and gentle as they stroked his excitement, making him huff and puff. I got him out into the open and drew back to admire him. He was as big in one way as he was in the other.

My hands went to his breeches and pushed them down. He came out into the dying sunlight, naked as he was born. He was one wildly excited male, I might add.

I put my hands to my blouse then, and got it off, enjoying his stares at my mammaries bouncing and bobbing on my chest. They were bloated from his lips, and there was saliva on my brown nipples. To my surprise, my tiredness was forgotten.

As the saying has it, relax and enjoy it.

My thumbs went into my slacks, started pushing. Neal didn't make it any easier, he had his big hands under my breasts as they dangled downward while I bent over, and he was tickling me fit to make me die of delight.

When my slacks were on the ground, he moved forward to plaster his naked self against my naked self. We rubbed fronts for a time, while his mouth feasted on my lips. He was something else again, this boy; he knew his

way about a female anatomy, and he taught me how well he knew.

He had me dancing on my toes and shivering all over. I was gasping and crying, half out of my skull with his fingerplay around my buttocks and my upper thighs. His manhood was an extension of his real self, it tickled and teased me where I did my thing.

If the rest of the Pathet Lao group under Lady Lumm, who might be on our trail so far as I knew, were to come bursting out of the bushes behind our little tent, Neal Harding and I would be gone geese. For we were mindless at the moment, living only where our nerve ends exploded in erogenous ecstasy.

He was raising me up, widening my thighs, crouching as he assumed the male position for the *el keurchi* posture of the Arabs, which is named orthostatic coitus by the learned. With his feet between mine, with my feet planted on his hips and with his palms beneath my buttocks, he rode me like the stallion man—the *ashwa*—that he was.

He even walked into the water and made me lower my feet until I stood on his feet while he continued the *neza el dela* movements inside me. This motion is highly regarded by the oriental erotologists; it is said to make women faint in desire again and again. All I know is, it worked with me.

Then he lowered us both into the water where we bathed and washed one another until our skins were glowing. I made myself as agreeable as possible to the Englishman. I tried to be what he wanted in a woman. Since he had the whip hand over me, to do anything else was assinine.

He rubbed me down with a towel on the water's edge, I dried him off. He was in good spirits, he laughed and made jokes and I busied myself cooking our meal. I think he would have preferred his own cooking but

mine was edible and after all—there was a master and slavegirl relationship to be maintained.

Neal wanted me to wear only my hide while I waited on him, as evidence of my poor rank in life. I did as he asked until the bugs got a little too intimate. Then I put my slacks and khaki shirt back on.

In the tent, later, he proved himself to be quite a man. He was at me damn near all night long. It was as if he were making up for lost time.

"I watched you show yourself off during those first three weeks," he breathed into my ear as he kissed my soft throat. "I damn near died from wanting you."

His hands were stroking my hard breasts, keeping the nipples up and my blood in a boil. He was a considerate lover, he took his time and made sure I enjoyed what he was doing before he let pleasure overwhelm him.

"I never showed myself off," I protested.

His chuckle teased my earlobe. "No? Ducks, you threw your teats around with gay abandon without any brassiere to hold them in. Your khaki shirt isn't thick enough to hide your nipple dots, you know. I watched them bobbing up and down, I heard those nipples scratching the khaki, day after day.

"And the way you swung your bum! Too much, too much. I almost threw you down on the trail to rape you a dozen times."

"Why didn't you?" I wondered.

His mouth was going lower, covering each breast, and now his tongue came out to lick my nipples. I guess everyone of us human beings has a kind of mother complex, because men—especially American males—are obsessed with the mammarys, their size and shape, their bounciness. This accounts for the popularity of topless waitresses, of course.

Neal Harding could have been an American very

easily, if his devotion to my big hard globes was any indication. He nursed like a month-old babe, his moist lips pastured as if draining sustenance from them into his big body. It was a long time before he let my nipples slip out of his mouth, to wander lower.

In between kisses he murmured, "I needed you to get the Eye of Buddha. I know damn well I couldn't have gotten it by myself. You're agile, strong. You could go into that damned *wat* on a rope—as you did—and come out of it again, safely."

His mouth was kissing my navel.

I asked, "Did you have this slavegirl bit in mind right from the start? In other words, like a big dummy, I let you use me?"

"Tit for tat, ducks," he chuckled, sliding his lips downward. "We helped each other. I helped you escape from the Pathet Lao and kept you alive in these rain forests. You helped me get the emerald."

His lips were browsing on my loins, sliding back and forth. It was getting hard to talk, my breathing was erratic, ragged. I had to force out the words when I spoke.

"What about those plans? Are you going to give them back to me? Neal—I've got to know."

"Maybe I will. You go on being a good little bad girl and we'll see about it."

He was going lower, kissing. His tongue came out. I yelped in utter delight and my hips squirmed around savagely. The ancient Greeks had a word for this sort of love-making: *thelazein*. Ovid named it the *dulce opus*, the sweet task. Cicero writes of Sextus Clodius performing this rite with Clodia, wife of Metellus.

Neal Harding was an expert in this 'licking of the lotus blossom,' as the Hindu erotologists name it. He went on and on until he had me banging my fists on the grass floor of the tent, my head going back and forth witlessly.

Then he slid up and with a deep cry of sexual torment, hurled himself upon me. Our pumping went on and on. . . .

The days turned into weeks on the trail. We had been off the Bolovens plateau for some time, now. We were heading west toward the Mekong river. Once at the Mekong, Neal was positive that he could hire a junk to take us downriver to its delta. From there it would be an easy matter to cross over into Viet Nam and to Saigon.

In Saigon, he could make arrangements to trade the data in the tin can and also to turn the big emerald Eye of Buddha into hard cash.

I wondered, at times, whether I would ever see Saigon.

My body was growing stronger, harder. I could carry the rolled tent and the camping equipment it held for long periods of time. It beat the hell out of me, but I could do it. When we made camp, I wasn't much good for anything except lying on my back and letting Neal Harding go to work on me. He never seemed to get enough. He was a real man, this Englishman.

Gradually, it was borne in on me that I might not make the Mekong Delta, ever. The more he had me, the less he seemed to think of me, except as a love partner. There are men like that, who tire of a woman after they have enjoyed her favors. No matter what she is like, no matter how beautiful or how knowing in the erotic embraces, the male hungers for something new. The psycho boys call this type of man a Don Juan.

I was pretty nearly at the end of my rope. I was haggard, getting actually scrawny, my flesh was starting to look like old leather. I was pack horse and prostitute, I was ready to collapse and give up the ghost. I didn't care whether or not Neal Harding shot me or not.

Then I found the *rauwolfia serpentina* shrub.

CHAPTER NINE

The *rauwolfia serpentina* plant is native to India and Southeast Asia. Its use by the medical men of India goes back thousands of years. They used it to cure insane people of their fits. Western doctors today recommend it as a very powerful tranquilizer. It subdues even the most violent patients.

It also serves to put people to sleep.

Like Neal Harding, man.

The plant has a fibrous root system and three or more stalks at the end of which triangular leaves grow and tiny clusters of berries. In my training course for L.U.S.T., I had been given intensive teaching in its preparation and usage.

I grabbed a couple of the plants and stuck them into the pocket of my torn and tattered slacks when the Englishman wasn't looking. They would not kill him, they would only put him into a deep sleep.

I spent two or three days getting it ready. At the end, I had a little pile of powder that I intended sprinkling on his food and in his tea, since I was doing all the cooking chores. The big adventurer did little more than hunt, these days. I was his slave, for real.

He rarely used his rifle any more, we were too close to where the guerrilla patrols slipped back and forth into Laos out of Thailand, and he did not want to attract any attention.

His traps were of the noose variety, bits of rope with loops to catch and hold an animal via a small sapling or dangling from a young tree fern with the noose close to the ground. Sometimes he laid them beside the tent, because animals would come sniffing and roaming out of

the forest as near as they dared, lured by the smell of food.

Once a leopard tangled itself in one of these nooses and Neal had to shoot it to keep it from clawing the rope to shreds. Rope was very valuable to him; without it, he could never have trapped as many small deer and wild pigs as he did.

As a result, we ate well, though I was usually too tired to feast the way my captor did. When he had eaten my cooking and had finished with my body, Neal would tie me to a treebole by a rope that was knotted so tightly I couldn't have gotten free in a hundred years. My arms were outstretched, embracing the treetrunk, far apart.

I got so I hated him, after a time.

He seemed to change, in the rain forest, with me as his slavegirl. I suppose there is a certain amount of brutishness in every man. Our relationship brought his animalistic instincts to a head. Half the time, I was sure he was going to whip me with his belt; that he did not spoke volumes for the fact that I was too much help to him. I was his beast of burden.

When we came at last to the banks of the Mekong river, I practically collapsed. The weight of the rolled tent was getting to me. It had assumed almost human proportions in my eyes. It bent me double, it was like a master itself. It waited for me in the dawn hours, it made my legs bend under me toward dusk.

I was never finished with it; even after it was off my back it still rode me. I had to undo the ropes, unroll the tent, take out the cooking pots. I built the fire, I took the meat Neal handed me and prepared it. I put the pots with the meat and the tea leaves in water on the fire. I even baked the biscuits.

"This is our last night," Neal said while I was on

hands and knees, blowing the little flame that was licking at the twigs I had piled high.

"That's good news," I muttered.

"Is it? I'm not at all sure, from your point of view."

I whipped around, eyes wide. I guess they showed my terror, because Neal Harding began laughing softly, relishing my fear.

"What do you mean?" I whispered. "Are you going to shoot me, leave me here dead while you run off to Saigon?"

"I haven't decided yet, I just haven't decided."

He turned away, went off to set his traps. This gave me the opportunity I needed. I got two stones and began to work the *rauwolfia serpentina* between them, grinding away patiently until I had a small heap of powder to add to what I had already made.

The food was cooking, meat slices bubbling merrily in their own juices. The hot water and tea leaves were simmering. I dropped some of the powder into the tea water, worked more of it into two of the four meat slices.

Neal Harding came back silently, gliding along the surface of the river in a boat which resembled a shallow-bottomed canoe. He ran it up onto the shore, quite pleased with himself.

"I found it where I was laying traps," he laughed, standing and brushing off his hands. "This is the end of our walking. From now on, we ride. Or at least—I ride. You may not be going back with me."

I said nothing. I just handed him his wooden platter with the meat on it, then I took my own meat and went a little distance away where I sat cross-legged on the ground and ate. I had no appetite, I was too excited, but I forced my mouth to open and my jaws to chew.

I got up and poured the tea into two tin cups. I carried his to Neal, then went off to my lonely supper. I did

not drink my tea, I sat there callously and watched him drink his. From time to time, when he was not looking, I emptied a little of my own tea into the ground.

The drug took effect quickly enough. In minutes, Neal was nodding, already half-asleep. He muttered, "I'd better tie you up, Eve. I feel mighty tired all of a sudden."

He made as if to rise, then sank back.

He was asleep before he knew it. I waited a few minutes, until he began snoring. Then I got to my feet and moved toward him. Very gently, I unfastened the tie-strings of the leather sack he carried at his belt and slipped it loose.

I opened the sack, brought the emerald and the tin can into view. My eyes were hypnotized by the emerald, I held it to the fireflames and watched green gleams blaze from it. I sighed. Being a woman who loves jewels, I yearned mightily to own this gem.

I carried the jewel and the tin can across the river clearing and into the forest, being careful not to step in the noose traps that practically surrounded the camp. As I walked, my eyes searched the ground for a stone roughly similar in size to the emerald.

When my gaze picked out such a rock, I cleaned it off and dropped it into the sack. My next object was to find a bit of wood or rock that might be the shape of the tin can. I intended to give Neal a chance to save himself, but I didn't want to alert him to the fact that I was holding the trump cards.

It took about half an hour, but I finally came up with a chunk of wood that might do the trick. Naturally, if Neal decided to examine his loot, he would discover soon enough that he had been duped. I was hoping that he wouldn't notice a thing.

Finding a spot in the forest about fifty feet from the edge of the clearing, I knelt down and began to dig,

using a sharp stick as a trowel. I did not need a big hole, I just wanted to cover the emerald and the tin can with a layer of dirt and leaves. The forest is a big place to go hunting for something so small. Only I would know where to find them.

I brushed bird and leaves over the hiding place.

Then I walked back to the camp. I was beat, myself. Maybe it was all the nervous tension, too, that was affecting me. I just sprawled out on the ground and began piling up the zzzzs.

When I woke the sun was in my eyes. Neal Harding was standing over me, a puzzled scowl on his face. I started to get up but he pushed me back.

"Just lie there, ducks. I want to look at you. I don't know whether you're a fool or an idealist."

We made a little tableau, like that, while his blue eyes went all over me, curious, enquiring. He said slowly, "You could have killed me when I was asleep. Why didn't you?" His head nodded toward the river. "There's a canoe there. You could have taken the emerald and the tin can and gone. It's all downriver, all the way to the Delta."

The Englishman shook his head as his hand patted the leather sack that held the rock and the chunk of wood. Then he laughed harshly.

"You're afraid to go it alone, that's it. You need me to get you safely through to Saigon. And you were betting that I'd do it, too. You're betting I will be touched by the fact that you didn't kill me, that I won't shoot you and leave you for dead."

I asked boldly, "Well? Did my gamble work?"

I really did like Neal Harding, despite the way he had treated me for the past week and more while we were making our way off the Bolovens plateau and toward the Mekong river. Call me a sentimental nut, but I was

giving him a chance to prove he had a good streak inside him.

He threw up his hands.

"All right, all right. You've made your point. Now come on, help me break camp. We'll pile this stuff in the canoe and get going."

I helped him knock out the tent pegs and roll up the tent. We cooked breakfast together, eating what was left of the meat and finishing the last of the tea. From now on, we would have to deal with the natives along the river shore, to get what food we needed.

Side by side, we washed the pots in the river.

"What a homey little scene!"

The words caught us both by surprise. I whirled, stared disbelievingly at Lady Lumm. She was standing just inside the clearing, wearing a shirt tucked up about her breasts and knotted so that her midriff and navel were exposed by the low-slung black pajama bottoms she wore.

The blue-steel Luger in her hands looked like a cannon. It was steady, unswerving at it aimed between Neal Harding and me. A fraction of an inch either way and she could have shot us both.

"Wha—what do you want?" I asked hoarsely.

"The Eye of Buddha and the tin can," she said.

Neal was getting to his feet. His face was a mixture of anguish, frustration and just plain rage.

"How did you follow us?" he croaked.

Her left shoulder lifted and fell in a casual shrug. "It wasn't hard. When my soldiers never came back, after chasing Eve here, I set out to learn what happened to them. I found them, all right—face-down in that mountain stream where you murdered them."

"It was them or me," I pointed out.

"All's fair in love and war, eh? Well, could be. I'm not holding that against you, Harding. I understand that

you wanted the Eye of Buddha and Eve wanted the Red Chinese invasion plans.

"You fooled me pretty good, Eve. You had me almost believing that you'd had nothing to do with what went on in Bangkok. Or—maybe I didn't want to believe you, maybe I just wanted to make love to you. Who knows?"

The Luger moved, she gestured Neal Harding to step away from me. "The contents of that little leather sack you have tied at your waist, please. Just undo the sack gently and toss it over here."

Neal cursed softly, but the muzzle of the Luger looked as big to him as it did to me, I guess. He worked at the tie-strings, loosed the sack and tossed it through the air at Lumm. It fell about five feet from her boots.

Lumm came forward and bent down, fumbling blindly for the sack, never taking her eyes off either of us. Neal was about five feet to my left, but we were both too far away from Lumm even to think of making a try for her gun.

Me, I was unarmed, but Neal still had his revolver holstered at his hip, and my Mauser in a pocket. If I could distract her attention for the moment, I knew damn well he would go for his gun and pump lead at her.

Maybe I could distract her.

I said, "Sorry about that, Lumm. There's just an old rock and a chunk of wood in the sack."

Her fingers reacted, they felt the outlines of the stone and the wood. I heard Neal gasp for a moment. Then his brain began working. His eyes flashed his understanding at me, and he gave a little nod, telling me to play it up.

"You're lying," Lumm snarled.

"Am I? Neal and I have been expecting you and your

men to catch up to us ever since we looted the Temple of the Thousand Deaths. What kept you?"

She smiled at me, wryly. "It's a nice try, honey—but it's no go. I can feel the jewel and the tin can. They're in here, all right."

"Don't be too sure," I said.

She must have caught the note of truth in my voice. She hesitated, glancing down at the leather sack. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the big Englishman tense.

"Where are your bullyboys?" I asked. "You could toss the sack to them and let one of them open it for you."

She shook her head, murmuring to herself, "I'm alone. I sent them on to Vientiane in Laos." Her smile showed her teeth. "When we came up to the temple and I saw that you'd looted it without being killed—you must tell me its secret, darling—I figured that I might as well profit from what you'd done.

"If I kept my men with me, I'd have to turn over the emerald and the tin can to my superiors. I began thinking about that. I decided that I've been through too much to go back and be a Communist all over again. With the emerald and the Red Chinese invasion plans, I could be a rich woman in the outer world. I've suffered enough for Mao Tse-tung. It's time I thought about Lumm for a change."

I nodded understandingly. "I don't blame you," I said out loud. "The only thing is, there's a rock and a piece of wood in that sack."

She juggled the sack in her palm.

Her eyes were intent on my face and on Neal Hard-ing as well. Maybe she read the truth in mine but she could also see that the big Englishman was poised to leap, to go for her once she took her eyes off him to empty the sack and see what it contained.

I could practically hear her thinking.

Then she grinned, and waved the Luger at me. "Off with your clothes, Eve. Come on now, strip down."

Harding blinked, caught by surprise. His eyes went to my fingers where they began working the buttons of my khaki blouse. Then he looked at Lumm. She laughed at his expression.

"You too, lover boy. Strip!"

He may have thought Lumm was doing this for kicks. I knew better. She hated men, she didn't have any orgy in mind. What she wanted was time to examine the leather sack. The best way to do that would be to keep Neal Harding too busy to make a jump for her.

Instead, she was going to have him jump me.

I was naked to my bellybutton when Lumm said, "Go kiss her breasts for her, Harding. Work her up. Have some fun."

I think it was then that he caught wise. He opened his mouth to protest, but Lumm hardened her voice and aimed the Luger at his kneecap.

"Go on, man. You've been balling her all the way from the *vat*. I can read signs, I saw evidence of what you've been doing to her. Now hurry it up or I'll put a bullet in your kneecap. You must know how painful that is."

The big adventurer advanced on me. He bent and kissed my nipples while I slithered out of my slacks. Lumm chuckled, watching. I gathered she was in no hurry to find out what was inside the sack. Why should she be? We three were all alone, and she had the gun.

Neal Harding's clothes, including the Webley and my Mauser, made a neat little pile about ten feet away. He had stripped down as Lumm ordered, he was like a hired gigolo ready to put on a sex show.

He whispered so only I could hear, "You're just bluffing, aren't you? The emerald and the tin can are in the sack."

"No," I moaned—he was kissing downward from my breasts to my belly, and I was responding to his caresses—"I did the switch last night while you were asleep."

Surprise made him jerk his head. Lumm snarled, "Stay at it, man. I want you too busy to pay me any attention."

She gave another order. The Englishman knelt down. I widened my thighs and stepped over his face. He went on kissing me.

Lumm laughed, "There. He's in no position now to bother me."

I could see her. Despite the thrills Harding was sending throughout my body, I watched her undo the tie-strings and empty the rock and the chunk of wood into her palm. She cursed fluently in Chinese, Laotian and English.

Harding did not hear her, my soft inner thighs were clamped to his ears. Lumm lifted her eyes to stare hard at me.

"You hid them?" she asked.

I nodded, quivering.

She laughed, "You'll tell me where they are."

"Ne-never. I won't tell unless—ohhh!"

My body shook all over in reaction to the *langueyage* Neal Harding was performing on me. I could no more have spoken than I could have jumped to the treetops. Lumm went on staring at me, scowling. She was thinking that she didn't dare kill me; she would never put hands on the jewel and the tin can if she did that. She was trying to think of a way out of her dilemma.

Neal Harding pushed me away and got to his feet. He was wildly aroused, he wanted satisfaction for his desires, but he was also torn by the need to take care of Lumm, to disarm and kill her, if he could.

He half-turned toward her, crouched. A growl rose

in his throat when he saw the rock and the bit of wood. Realization dawned on him.

He whirled, slammed a fist at my face.

“Damn bitch,” he rasped.

Lumm fired.

The bullet hit him just as his fist met my cheek. I was falling backward, trying to ride with the punch. Alone, he might have killed me. The bullet caught him in the back, ploughed into his flesh. His naked body hit my falling body, knocked me breathless when it landed on me.

He was dead when we hit the ground. Lumm was a good markswoman with that damned Luger. As I wriggled out from under him, she came a few feet nearer.

“Where is it?” she rasped.

“You won’t kill me,” I breathed defiantly. “Dead, I can’t tell you a thing.”

Her lips curved into a cruel smile. “No, I won’t kill you—but I might put a couple of bullets in your knees, as I threatened to do to him.” Her gun gestured at the dead Neal Harding.

I nodded. An idea was coming into my head. If I played along, if I led her toward where I had hidden the jewel and the tin can—

“All right,” I said. “There’s nothing else I can do.”

I started walking toward the edge of the rain forest, with her stepping aside to give me room. She went back two steps.

The noose trap, that Neal had placed at that spot earlier, tightened as her foot touched it. The rope grabbed her ankle and the young sapling to which the noose was attached, swung upward with a vicious jerk.

Lumm screamed, yanked upside-down off her feet.

The Luger flew from her hand. I dove for it, caught it on my knees before it could touch the ground.

At first, Lumm did not know what had happened. It

had been so fast, she had been upright one moment, upside-down the next, that her wits were more than mildly addled. Then she realized she was in a trap.

She tried to double up her body, to reach the noose and loosen it. I watched her frantic and futile attempts for a few moments, then I ran off into the rain forest. In moments, I was digging at the loose dirt, lifting out the emerald and the tin can.

I came back to the river clearing. Lumm hung with her head a yard from the ground, crying in frustration. She pleaded, "You aren't going to leave me here, Eve? After what we've meant to each other?"

"You bet your sweet bippy I am, love. You'd have shot me after I'd showed you where I hid these things." I held the jewel and the tin can out for her to see. "You're going to hang there while I take off for points south. If you get rescued before a leopard finds you, all to the good. If you don't—"

I shrugged and walked past her. This spy business is a dog-eat-dog affair. I was top dog at the moment and I meant to keep it that way.

I got dressed, I piled the rolled-up tent and the cooking gear into the canoe. I took all the weapons, the rifle and the Mauser and Harding's revolver, plus the Luger, with me. Lumm hung there and watched. She did not scream, she was too afraid her voice might summon a leopard.

My fingertips blew her a kiss. Then I pushed out into the river, sat down and began to paddle. I made good time, it wouldn't be too long before I would be at the Mekong Delta, where I was hoping that a Marine river-boat would pick me up.

Actually, I had only one real worry.

Would David Anderjanian let me keep the emerald?

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